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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a description and analysis of the work of a group of primary grade teachers who decided to study their practices and engage their students in inquiry. Their school was in a lower socioeconomic area with a multiethnic student body. The political nature of their work is documented via two themes that emerged from their work. The first theme, identification, involves the development of self, relationships, and curriculum as the foundation for understanding the school context. The second theme, disruption, demonstrates how teacher inquiry disrupted the regularities of the school. The theoretical basis for the work rests in "servicing in," a view of staff development that demands that researchers and teachers address mutually-constructed agendas in their work; teachers study themselves with an outsider who is also studying them. "Servicing-in" requires commitment about the past as well as the future and disruption and identification, which call for teachers who write and think. Teacher conversations and inquiry developed into teacher research that was political and social because it occurred in a context that demanded sameness and continuity--a process of invention that occurred under adversity, self-doubt, and even oppression. Conclusions suggest the difficulty of this work; the ways in which the work results in advocacy for children, teachers, and schooling; and the ways in which a school might change to support such work on an institutional level. (Contains 98 references.) (Author/NAV)

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Running head: TEACHERS' STUDY GROUP

Teachers' Study Group: Forum for Collective Thought, Meaning-Making, and Action

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Abstract

This paper presents a description and analysis of the work of a group of teachers who decided to study their practices and engage their children in inquiry. The political nature of their work is documented via two themes that emerged from their work. The first theme, identification, involves the development of self, relationships, and curriculum as the foundation for understanding the school context. The second theme, disruption, demonstrates how teacher inquiry disrupts that regularities of the school. The theoretical basis for the work rests in 'servicing-in', a view of staff development that demands that researchers and teachers address mutually constructed agendas in their work. The conclusions suggest the difficulty of this work and the ways in which the work is advocacy for children, teachers, and schooling.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) and interpretation (Spradley, 1980) of the work of a teacher study group during the 1994-1995 school year. The study group came together in a rather unique way in that the district office offered the 34 elementary schools in this district the opportunity to have an additional $25,000 for one school year ('94-'95). Schools were invited to submit proposals for how they would use these funds to support staff development for teachers of young children (through grade three). Since the use of the funds would be at the discretion of the selected sites and the district office was not implementing a pre-formulated curriculum, the selected sites would be referred to as Research and Development (R & D) sites. Fourteen schools submitted proposals; two schools were selected because their comprehensive proposals included their entire staffs. This paper focuses on Elmwood Elementary School, one of the two schools selected for the staff development project.

The idea for staff development as a way of "increasing children's learning" (district office consultant) emerged at the district office. Consultants employed by the district had read Fullan (1991) and were searching for ways to support teacher change from the district level while allowing it to cultivate at the local level, i.e.: at each elementary school site within the district. Since the 1994-'95 school year was designated, by the director of instruction for the district, as the year in which the district would implement an early childhood curriculum, an Early Childhood Study Committee was formed. The district's early childhood consultant wanted to help the teachers of children in grades

pre-kindergarten through third grade adopt an attitude towards learning reflective of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987) and consistent with Fullan's ideas of mutually developed and supported change.

The Early Childhood Study Committee developed the proposal process, discussed above, in which schools submitted proposals for implementation plans describing how the schools might increase developmentally appropriate practices within the school. The committee did honor every proposal by allotting small amounts of funding ($1200 for the year) to the twelve schools that submitted proposals by individuals or small groups. The two schools that submitted more comprehensive proposals were each given $25, 000 for the 1994-1995 school year. I offered my services to the Early Childhood Study Committee as a researcher and resource to help with selection of the R & D sites and, subsequently, with the year of work at each site.

The School in Which the Teachers Worked

Elmwood Elementary School is situated in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood in the capital city of a middle-America state. The city's population is approximately 200,000, consisting of generally white middle and upper middle class people. Most of the city's diverse population is limited to the neighborhoods around five elementary schools. There is an African American area in the city, an international community of students that attend the University, a Native American population (less that 1%), and a growing Hispanic and Southeast Asian population, all within the neighborhoods of the five lower socio-economic status (SES) schools.

Elmwood is one of the five lower SES schools. Elmwood has one third of the English as a second language (ESL) children in the district. The principal, Mr. Z, calls the school an 'international school' with fourteen

languages represented from the Mid East, Asia, Spanish-speaking countries, and Bosnia. "Anywhere there's been a war is represented at our school," (interview, 5/95) he says. With an enrollment of 600, the school has a large population of identified special education students (over 110). Of the seventy-five sixth graders in attendance at Elmwood, seven of them began kindergarten at the school. Of the 600 names that could be included in the school directory, only 300 responded affirmatively and the rest asked not to be included. Mr. Z suggests that this is because families do not want their addresses and phone numbers known publicly because of the possible access this would allow various agencies.

In the 1994-'95 school year, there was a turnover of 500 students, meaning that a student either left or enrolled in school while the overall school enrollment remained the same. The school has an early childhood special education program for four year olds, a four year old Head Start Program, and a 'Baby Eagles' (eagles are the school mascot) program for two year old children in the neighborhood. The federally funded Transition Grant at Elmwood supports the transition of students from Head Start to primary grade classrooms by helping teachers via workshops, release time for home visits, and site visits by curriculum support staff. Elmwood goes through grade six, with four classes of each grade from kindergarten through six. The school has what Mr. Z refers to as "economic diversity" with about 75% of the children on free or reduced lunch. In 1996-'97, Elmwood will be a Title I school. Elmwood scored the lowest in the district on standardized tests administered in the spring, 1995.

Elmwood's Research & Development plan called for an extension of work that had already been initiated at the school. The teachers, in the 1993-1994 school year, began the Elmwood Institute. The Institute was

designed by Mr. Z in an effort to allow teachers to share ideas. Each month, one teacher was responsible for researching an area of interest and reporting on her findings at the Institute's meeting which took place in lieu of a faculty meeting. Attendance at the Institute was not mandatory, but was typically over 80%. Teachers learned about portfolios, other alternatives to assessment, issues of language and literacy, and more over the course of the school year. Elmwood teachers, all of whom signed their proposal, wanted to have an Institute with pay, with external experts, and with release time for teachers to have larger chunks of time to learn and plan. Although the money was originally intended for teachers of young children, Elmwood's comprehensive proposal for teachers through grade six was accepted by the Early Childhood Study Committee because of its consistency with the Committee's goal of supporting the school site as the context for teacher growth.

During the 1994-1995 school year, when the school had the money to develop their Institute, some changes occurred. Mr. Z and the teachers decided that they wanted time to develop grade level institutes, essentially study groups that would be specific to grade levels. They also wanted to meet with adjacent grade levels periodically (e.g.: second and third grade teachers meet to discuss issues that cross the grades, such as instruction in math). The bulk of the $25,000 dollars was spent on substitute teachers. Subs were hired for either mornings or afternoons so that each teacher received a total of nine half days out of their classroom. They would use the time to study issues specific to their grade levels. Quite often, the time was used to plan. Initially this frustrated the Early Childhood Consultant because she thought that teachers already had

sufficient plan time; however, she found that planning and thinking about developmentally appropriate practices could go hand in hand.

Our Group Forms

By the middle of October, there were many areas of study being undertaken by various grade levels of teachers at Elmwood. They were pursuing alternative assessment, literacy, children-as-inquirers, thematic planning, and more. I met with teachers from many of the groups, usually (reflective of my interest in emerging literacy) with groups of primary teachers. Two first grade teachers, one second grade teacher, three third grade teachers, the teacher of the Montessori (multiage) classroom, and the early childhood special education teacher wanted more interaction with each other. As the first semester progressed, we met informally on the one day each week when I was at Elmwood . By the beginning of second semester, we decided to meet every Wednesday after school because our informal discussions whet our appetites but did not satisfy our needs for conversation. Each teacher decided if they wanted independent study (university) credit, district staff development credit, or if they wanted to attend for personal/professional credit. Although most would have attended regardless of credits towards salary enhancement, the contact hours required for credit helped structure the regularity of our meetings. Table 1 shows the participants' names and staff positions.

Name	Staff Position
Kim L	First Grade Teacher
Kim R	First Grade Teacher
Kim Z	Second Grade Teacher
Liz	Third Grade Teacher
Linda	Third Grade Teacher
Nancy	Third Grade Teacher
Mona	Montessori (Multiage, 1st-3rd)
Jane	District Early Childhood Consultant
Rick	University Researcher

Table 1

Names and Positions of Study Group Participants

I imagined that we would have "interwoven conversations" (Newman, 1991) about our life and our literacy and that these conversations would be reflected in classroom strategies and activities that would support children's learning. Newman suggests that:

> . . . learning and teaching are distinct ventures. . . Learning is constructing out of our individual experiences some sense of how the world works. Teaching involves intentionally helping to extend another's knowledge or skill. Sometimes these two activities connect; frequently, however, they don't. (p. 14)

My goal was to support the connection between teacher learning and teaching. I suspected our group would become a special branch of the literacy club (Smith, 1988). And we would; but in much more complex ways than I ever imagined. As Hollingsworth (1994) explains, "knowing through relationship to self and others is central to teaching the child" (p.

68). Our relationships became an important part of our learning and teaching because of the view of staff development that was foundational to our learning.

A View of Staff Development

Gordon Wells (1986) explains how schools typically reach decisions about staff development:

> Traditionally, decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and school organization have been made by theorists, researchers and policy makers, based in universities or ministry offices. Plans for putting these decisions into effect are then drawn up by senior administrators in each jurisdiction, who transmit them to the school administrators who are responsible, in turn, for ensuring that they are implemented. In this hierarchical structure, expertise is equated with power and status, that is to say with those who, at the apex of the pyramid, are furthest removed from the actual sites of learning and teaching. (p. 1)

The approach we took in our study group is called 'servicing-in' (Meyer, 1995) and is based on the idea that an outsider who approaches a school to do 'in-servicing' does not understand the context sufficiently to make recommendations for teacher practice. Servicing-in requires the outsider (me, in this case) to learn about, be respectful of, and put some tension on the existing school culture. Much in the way that Dyson (1993) discusses children's writing as an act performed within a community, servicing-in requires the outsider to learn about the community before engaging as a resource. It is a commitment over time.

Servicing-in supports teachers as individuals, consistent with Wideen's (1987) view that:

> . . . collaboration, collegiality and mutual adaptation [are] necessary ingredients in any school improvement plan....[this] views single-minded policy and managerial perspectives of school reform with skepticism. It rejects the notion that teachers and school principals can be manipulated through fiat and exhortation. (Wideen, 1987, p. 5)

Servicing-in fundamentally rests in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the zone of proximal development which suggests a tension between a learner and an 'other' who acts as a mediator. In a servicing-in relationship with a school, the 'other' (also called researcher, mediator) is a learner along with those who work at the school. Indeed, the role of the other is variable in a group of teachers as areas of expertise are expressed during the groups' affiliation, supporting any group member as an other who is more knowledgeable. This means that the "more knowing other" that Vygotsky describes is not always the outsider (me). More frequently, with the help of group members who have a historical perspective on life at Elmwood, the group constructs understanding of the context and their work in it with the help of a colleague whose insights stretch the group.

Understanding and living in the setting requires "social intelligence" (Dewey, 1938) so that one can create ideas, develop them, and maintain flexibility to fit what emerges within the ever-changing context. Dewey expressed it this way:

> The plan, in other words, is a cooperative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. . . . The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence. (Dewey, 1938, p. 72)

The foundational premise of servicing-in is that teachers know the context well (Klassen & Short, 1992), they understand the institutional regularities (Sarason, 1971) with which they live, and all changes are built upon their emerging change agendas. As Meyer (1995) explained:

> Griffin (1983) defines staff development as "any systematic attempt to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understandings of school persons toward an articulated end" (p. 2). In a servicing-in approach, the 'articulated end' is constructed via negotiation with all present at the site. This means that the role of

> the outside individual changes from 'developer' to mediator. Working together to articulate an end and develop vehicles for that articulation is much harder work than traditional transmission approaches to staff development because of the lack of predictability and the need to build a trusting and caring environment. (p. 4)

Servicing-in is an active approach to participatory staff development that views teachers as "meaning makers" (Wells, 1986); Wells' discussion of children as meaning-makers whose meaning-making is often disregarded or offered low prestige in the school setting is applicable to teachers, too, because their professional thinking is overlooked when their professional development is prescriptive. Servicing-in is a democratic process in which agendas are mutually constructed.

Servicing-in is a socio-cultural approach to staff development:

> [T]he goal of a sociocultural approach to mind is to explicate how human action is situated in cultural, historical, and institutional settings. . . the key to such an explication is to use the notion of mediated action as a unit of analysis and the person(s)-acting-with-mediational-means as the relevant description of the agent of this action. From this perspective, any tendency to focus exclusively on the action, the person(s), or the mediational means in isolation is misleading. (Wertsch, 1991, p. 119)

And there is more to it, as well, because servicing-in involves the mediator as an advocate once she or he understands a situation and the action that those who live in it want to take upon it. Servicing-in is a form of social responsibility and social activism. Maxine Greene (1995) engenders this idea in her recent call for imagination as a facet of social change:

> Again, it may be the recovery of imagination that lessens the social paralysis we see around us and restores the sense that something can be done in the name of what is decent and humane. (p. 34)
> We need . . . to recapture some of the experiences of coming together that occurred in the peace movement and the civil rights movement. We need to articulate what it signifies for some of us to support

> people with AIDS, to feed and house homeless persons in some dignified way, to offer day-long support to the very young in store-front schools, to bring into being teacher communities in our working spaces. (p. 197)

Of course, there already are "teacher communities in our working spaces," but these communities do not always support teacher development, student learning, or teacher activism.

A commitment to servicing-in is a commitment to uncertainty because we can not predict what the group may identify as urgent, salient, or important and what actions they may want to initiate. As a literacy expert, I might offer suggestions for dealing with some issues within the extant school culture, and I can help the group make connections to other agencies for help, if need be.

Above all, servicing-in is a return to self for some and a discovery of self for others. It is a return to self for those teachers and staff developers who found their voice, at one point in time, and then either let it go, lost it in the rush of living, or suppressed it. It is a discovery of self for those who were so busy being "good" that they never found a sense of individuality. It is a process that supports resistance because, as Alice Walker (1993) so poignantly demonstrates, "Resistance is the secret of joy!" (p. 280). This is, then, political work, as will be described below in greater detail. As we work to support teachers in understanding their lived experience, outsiders involved in servicing-in shift their stance from regarding teachers as passive subscribers to viewing them as active participants who engage in conversations.

> Politically, the move to the conversational format for support and research involved a shift in power from my previous role as the teachers' course instructor. I had to change my interactions so that I was no longer telling teachers what I knew (as the group's "expert" on the topic of reading instruction) and checking to see if they had

> learned it. I had to develop a process of working with them as a colearner and creator of evolving expertise through nonevaluative conversations. To accomplish this, I had to be still and listen I also had to struggle publicly with what I was learning. Our change in relationship now required that I look at transformation in my own learning. . . as equally important in determining the success of teachers' knowledge transformations. (Hollingsworth, 1992, p. 375)

Servicing-in ultimately involves a journey into self, into self within a context (being a teacher in a school), into context (understanding the school), and into the lives of others (being a support for others' growth). Increasingly, it feels like a return to something old and wise, a journey similar to the one Scott Momaday (1976) describes as "old and essential" (p. 4); it is "a quest, a going forth upon the way " (p.88)

It is a quest that leads across a variety of literatures and lived experiences. It is a quest that has themes for understanding change and areas of surprise and sometimes discomfort within self, the group, and implications for others. With that as some foundation for a view of staff development, I turn to the staff development group at Elmwood Elementary School.

Opening & Closing Our Sessions

I include in this paper the following brief descriptions of how we typically began and concluded our sessions because we want others to know that we needed to spend time on some lighter issues so that our minds would be clearer and focused on the more intense facets of our work.

Getting Started

We typically dealt with administrative issues first. Folks wanted to know about schedules, time, number of credit units, cost of credit, salary advancement, grading policies, and the nature of the commitment required by the group. I also spent portions of the beginning few minutes of some sessions informally advising group members about masters programs.

Some of these issues changed over time, especially when we decided to write a book together. The commitment had changed from regular sessions focused on making sense of our systematic collections of classroom life to making those collections into a readable piece and we needed to discuss this change.

By the end of our third session, most of the issues of registration had been settled. We dealt with the district policy that prohibited teachers from attending staff development courses before the school day officially ended at 3:30. This was a sensitive topic because the children were sent home forty minutes before this time and group members did not understand the district rationale for having us wait to begin staff development activity. The decision was made to start as soon as possible at the end of the school day. And, there were issues of children in daycare for extended hours and families that needed us. These were added

pressures for the group, ones with which we were willing to deal in order to meet, support each other, challenge each other, learn, and grow.

We heard about ear infections, baby teeth, pregnancies, and other issues of living the life of a teacher and a mother or father and a wife or husband. We also shared in more intense tragedies. Kim L was going through a very upsetting divorce and left a few times to meet with a lawyer. She missed days of school when she attended court. In early February, we learned that Linda's husband's cancer had returned. He had been in remission for the past four years, but by March he was in the last stages of liver cancer. He died before the school year was out. She returned to our group and immersed herself in her students, her own children, and her writing. She wrote with her third grade partner, Liz, with whom she shares much of her life. The tensions in school, out of school, between our in-school lives and our out-of-school lives were intense, real, and recognized and shared within our group. We supported each other across the many contexts of our lives.

As administrative issues wound down, a group member would typically ask about others' progress or begin to discuss her own progress on her writing, reading, thinking, and classroom activity. This evolved into a check-in reminiscent of Atwell's (1986) status of the class. We would move around our circle and folks would fill us in on their progress and experiences since our last meeting. Thus began our process of opening our collective zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), our thought collective. When we first began meeting formally, group members apologized for talking. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to talk so much," was often heard. But these apologies ceased as our interest in each other became clear.

The End of a Session

The main part of our sessions were the rich conversations that followed; they are the substance of this paper and are discussed in-depth in the pages ahead. Administrative issues re-emerged near the end of many sessions as we looked forward to our next meeting. We planned how we would like to spend our time together in subsequent sessions and agreed that we might: listen to a member read something that she wrote; present data that we were collecting as a way of initiating discussions about what the data showed or implied; share our writing by distributing copies at our meeting; read articles or chapters in common; subgroup for articles not read in common (this was never done); co-create curriculum; do book talks on books read by a single individual within the group; respond to drafts of pieces we wrote and circulated prior to our meeting; and plan to use time to discuss life at the school and within the district.

Individuals became comfortable asking for time at subsequent class meetings, either time for themselves to speak or requesting others to speak. When Mona mentioned that she had completed her reading of Graves (1991), I requested that she do a book talk on that at our next meeting. One week Liz and Linda described some work their children were doing in a study of our city (described later in this paper). They requested some time that would focus on processes of finding information, grouping kids, and other pragmatic issues. Liz was insistent that we "not spend more than ten minutes on this . . . just a quick sort of brainstorming." Kim Z reported on her progress as she read chapters of Wells (1986) and related those to language and learning in her classroom. Sometimes, as the class wound down, someone would comment on the writing style of one of the authors we had read. One evening, after we struggled to understand the

implications of Dewey (1938) in our classrooms, Liz asked, "Why did he write that way?" Others nodded and moaned in agreement; Dewey was hard to understand and teasing out the implications of his work for our classrooms was also difficult. We were debriefing from our time together.

During our first few meetings, apologies sometimes emerged as the meeting wound down. Kim R approached our group with a writing problem that she was having. Things were not fitting together and as each member made a suggestion, she would explain why the solution would not work. Although we thought we had reached the end of the session, we focused on Kim almost an hour. She explained that this time had helped because she was viewing her piece in a more positive light. Then she turned to me and said, "Sorry, I totally blew class today with this." Of course, she hadn't; she'd set an important precedent in that participants learned that we could, as a group, focus on one person for an extended period of time, although we learned that we would have to monitor our time more carefully and plan to focus on an individual this way, but earlier in the session. Discussing the importance of having one group member receive the sustained focus of the group is one example of how we debriefed at the end of a session.

Before leaving the room of the person who had sponsored our meeting, we'd help to clean the room and decide where to meet and how we'd spend our time at our next meeting. The main part of our meetings was the time we spent discussing our thinking, reading, and, more inclusively, our research.

Initiating the Research Process

The teachers in our group decided to do research projects. We'd spent the earlier part of the school year reading broadly and were now ready to focus on specific facets of our teaching lives. Kim R, Kim L, and Kim Z would pursue an in-depth study of children's inquiry in their classrooms. This intrigued us all because it required layers of inquiry: the children were researching areas of interest identified by the children, the teachers were studying the children, and the teachers were studying themselves as they learned about themselves and their students as inquirers. Nancy would study her students as they created a restaurant. Mona began studying written language activity in her Montessori classroom. Liz and Linda were researching themselves. Geane Hanson suggests that teacher researchers actively study themselves as they come to understand that we "are who we teach and we teach who we are" (in Meyer, 1996). Liz and Linda were curious about their evolution from begin teachers who were bound to manuals to being whole language teachers. They traced their professional lives; this process evolved into one of reading something they hadn't previously read and then formally making connections (in writing) from that text to other lived experiences. Pam was going to study her role as a change agent in the school because she had been instrumental in getting Elmwood to be a Research and Development site. Jane, the district early childhood consultant who attended every other session, would study her role in supporting a school committed to change. I would study the role our study group played for each of us as individuals, its meaning within the school, and the implications for other schools.

During our first few meetings as a formal study group, many ideas were explored as ways of addressing our interests. Kim R and Kim L wanted to

write to Judy Graves (an educational consultant) because Judy's presentation the previous summer had made an impact on how they guide their children in inquiry. Kim L said that her work as a teacher had changed:

> This is more work and it's harder. We don't spend our time cutting stuff out for the kids to put together. They [the children] are doing a lot more thinking about what it is they are doing and where they are going. (File 2.1, 1995)

Even though each of us was just beginning our research focus (initiating the systematic collection of data and bringing it to sessions to discuss), classroom activity was changing. Liz said that since she and Linda began the self-study of their literacy teaching lives, she sees children in a different light. "No more cutsey stuff," she explained; her children were studying important (to kids) topics. "Two years ago, I wouldn't have said all kids can learn," Liz said at one of our sessions. Now that her children were identifying areas to study, they were investing time, owning their work (Atwell, 1996), and experiencing authentic learning and Liz was seeing them all learn.

Our early sessions were characterized by frequent changes of focus across individuals and topics. Kim Z said that she wasn't sure how to keep track of the classroom activities, some others brought work that their students had done, Kim R and Kim L brought a letter they had received from Judy Graves and a response they had drafted, and Nancy discussed the restaurant her kids were building and how it addressed district curricular demands.

Kim Z's focus on a specific area of study that her students identified (life in the Arctic) led to our first discussion of this work as something that affects others in the school. Typically the second grade team all

studied the same thing at the same time, using the exact same materials. Kim told our group that the district 'garbology' unit had arrived from the science consultant at the district office and that Kim had told her team that she would not be doing it in her classroom. She was anxious because this had not been done before; at this point she was wondering if the rest of her team would decide that it was acceptable to study different things at the same time (across classrooms). This was the first report to our group that some of our work may have disrupted the context, in this case the second grade team. The rest of the team was concerned about this departure from the team norm; they did not depart from the team's plans.

> And there were questions. Kim Z said she had a list of things: from my mind and my readings: whole language, constructivism, and other words. Are these the same thing, all over and over again, or are they different? (file 2.1, 1995)

Later in the same session, as Kim described some classroom activity, she said, "Ahhhhh, I've created learners." She meant that she and her students found new energy and enthusiasm for learning and that calling what she was doing by a certain label was not the same as naming a process to signify the understanding of the complexity and affect of such work.

Enthusiasm was spreading throughout the group as individuals reported on learning within their classroom that seemed new and different because of the teachers' focus on themselves and their kids as learners, rather than seeing classrooms as a place that enacted curricular guidelines imposed from outside. Kim R brought photos, anecdotal notes, and quotes of child language from a small group in her classroom that was studying about the human body. The children had located a life-sized skeleton; they had labeled all of the bones with sticky notes and were tracing each

others' bodies and drawing organs inside themselves. They were making plans to get a calf heart from a supermarket.

There was a need for information as we organized areas to study within individual's classrooms. I helped locate texts and articles that might be helpful, especially those on literacy and learning. Mona pushed us into some philosophy when she presented some of the foundational ideas of Montessori (1966) and how those support the activity within her classroom. Our beginning sessions tended to move along gently from person to person as each had some 'air time' to explore and think out loud. I thought that we were glossing over important issues and, at the same time, felt the urgency for each group member to have time to speak. I wasn't sure how to resolve this tension between each person talking a little bit and the need for individuals to have extended air time to think aloud. Smaller groups seemed to be the logical answer, but the group did not want to separate; they liked being together and pretty much demanded that we stay as one whole group.

Kim R helped us deal with the issue of individuals sharing for small amounts of time which did not allow for the depth of thinking that the teachers' inquiry demanded. We decided that we would write up our research from this year so that it would be in some form that other teachers could read. As we began our session in early March, Kim R was clearly frustrated.

> Kim R: You guys, I asked this before, but I never really got any help, and I really need help. . . I have all this stuff and I have to organize this into a meaningful way for me and for others to look and understand what I've done, and I don't know how to do it, and this helps me maybe think . . . I have it . . . you know, I have the whole thing day by day of what we did . . . Because I am . . . because I want to sit down and do this, but I don't know what to do. This is kind of like what I can go back to, to look at to

> say, oh, this is what we did this day, and this is what I said to them, and this is what some of them responded with. . . But, so for my own use . . . see, things like that, I want something that when somebody comes in and says "I don't understand this project," I can say, "Look at this," you know, maybe that will help you. And that's what I want this to be. And I also want it to be so when I'm doing this, I can go back and say, okay, on this day, and I can use that quote that a child used. . . his is my journal of one project. I've got another one of these, and I'm starting my third, and I'm starting to get overwhelmed and I need to do something with it, because I'm getting . . . Today, I wrote . . . "they said let's go to the library and find some books . . . "What kind of books are we going to look for," I asked. Books on caves and volcanoes, said Teresa. I also wanted to find books about our chosen topic. " I mean, it's coming out more, you know, but I wanted to write it, I was tired of waiting. I couldn't wait until after school to write it so I wrote it. I thought I'm not getting into this, I need to write this down before I forget. . .

That evening I elaborated my field notes and wrote:

> Kim R apologized for doing this and then said that her questions from last time were not answered. We spent an hour listening to and helping her with how to write all this up. She has a "mountain" [her word] of material: kids' work, her notes, her journal, her scripting of kids' working together, kids' portfolios. We discussed who the audience was; who was she writing this for? What did she want? What did she want others to know? . . . she did wonder if others thought this a waste of time, but it was so powerful--about writing and the self and how to put those together. She wants every journal entry in there. I said to put them in if she wants that. She said that she wasn't going to read anything for next time; she was going to start to write something. (Field notes, 2.2 3/8/95)

Kim R had changed the group. At our next session, she read what she had written. Then Kim Z took the floor and read what she had written, perhaps inspired by Kim R's commitment to write and take a bigger piece of time to be the focus of the group. Subsequent sessions tended to focus on one or two people's writing and thinking. We would listen, support, question, cheer on, and push each other to write because we were finding that our writing was indeed "shaping our thinking" (Langer & Applebee, 1987). We

were not just beginning any more. We were deep into what it means to be a teacher researcher. Our group still discussed administrative issues at some sessions and we talked about other items which are categorized and discussed below. But, our main thrust was our work and its impact on our thinking and the lives of our students.

Identifying Our Research

The change was dramatic and it was not easy. Each member of the group agonized over how to collect, how to organize , and even how to recapture what had already gone by, unrecorded. Kim Z reflected this feeling:

> Well, I'm still writing on that . . . [a group of children studying the Arctic]. But, see, now this time I'm trying to journal more [about a group studying the zoo], where, you know, by day. . . .the observations, . . . totally a journal, with my pictures inserted, . . . Because I don't know if I can go back and remember everything that we did [in the Arctic study]. (Transcription in 2.2, 3/8/95)

This kind of thinking aloud encouraged others to take risks in their thinking and in their practice. The group supported members in their feelings of having been granted permission to try new things, as Mona said,

> [the group has given] me permission to do all the things that I kept wanting to do but was sort of looked at aside like you shouldn't do it. Even though it very much is part of her [Montessori's] philosophy. (Transcription, in 2.2, 1995)

As we became more systematic about our reading and writing, doing it more regularly, we also felt the full range of emotions that writers feel: angry, scared, annoyed, frustrated, threatened, embarrassed, amazed, empowered, strong, serious, foolish, and more (Goldberg, 1986; Dillard, 1989). Mona expressed some of these feelings, helping all of us feel a bit more at ease in sharing our work:

> . . .when I first began writing this it was more of a textural context and it was like I was out to prove something to someone. And then I started reading The Art of Teaching Writing [Calkins, 1994]. And I thought why am I writing that way? I don't like to write that way. So the second Saturday morning, I got up and I wrote the next thing which is what I'm going to share with you and I don't know what I'm going to do with this part yet. And this part isn't as long as that part so we're all okay. [Laughter] But I think this is going to lead into what I will write at the end of the session. (Transcription from File 2.2, 1995)

And Kim R poignantly expressed the 'jump' into the passion we began to feel about researching in classrooms:

> [Kim is trying to STOP collecting data for a while so that she can analyze and write about what she's already collected]
> Rick: Well, there's a couple of options as far as that. One is stop collecting.
> Kim R: Well, I can't. I'm obsessed with this now. (Transcript 3.2, 3/8/95)

As individuals changed, our sessions together changed. The following sections describe my role in the our group, the role of the district early childhood consultant (Jane), the role of the readings we did in common and individually, working within a changing school, changes that teachers made in their thinking and strategies with children, and the way we supported each other in our growth.

My Role

> Because of what you bring out. . . You gently guide us and teach us but you question and ask. You don't set one way. We learn what we want to learn because we want to and I see all of us doing that here. You know. And you don't say it has to be just a certain way and ideally, Montessori said that the true test is when human beings stop taking tests and start learning for the reasons that we are learning here today in using this. (Mona, File 2.3, transcription, 3/28/95)

My role in our study group was that of a researcher and a resource. I facilitated our sessions, as described above, until folks began to take over with their own agendas. Then, I found myself talking less and less and

listening a lot more. Mona's quote, above, couldn't have pleased me more if I'd have paid her to say it! She described how I wanted to be as she described her perception of me. Still, I knew that I needed to do more, as Hollingsworth (1994) so poignantly explains:

> I continued my search for other stories and theories that would help me better understand ours, and moreover, help us link our experiences in the group with others in the larger world. I searched for similar patterns in others' experiences to weave into the tapestry of our stories. I discovered many educators who suggested. . . that teachers require a dynamic understanding of self in relationship to both self and others across multiples contexts! Our group was surely providing a context for self/other relationship development. . . (p. 68)

Being a Resource

I continued to remind us to get started and, as the group became tired, I reminded us to end so that we could all go home. "I always have such a headache after this class...but it's a good headache," Kim L said. We all agreed to having headaches and bring our session to a close. I also tended to be the individual who made sure that we honored our agenda. This became increasingly important when individuals agreed to bring things to read to us. I didn't want any one's efforts overlooked. And, as I sensed a meeting winding down, I would suggest that we set the agenda for the next meeting so that we'd be clear on what to read, who might be presenting writing, and what questions we wanted to address as we looked forward.

I also worked to have us slow down and be tentative and elaborate at the same time. I explained that I wasn't quick to leave an issue; I felt that quickness was typical in schools because of the rush to find a solution to a problem or get an issue addressed during a ten minute lunch

rush. I wanted to encourage a slower process to see what happened as we became more reflective practitioners (Schon, 1986).

I found it helpful to initiate the first few discussions about our readings and, later on, to talk about how the writer wrote those articles. When we read Dewey, as discussed above, there were questions about his writing style. Rief's (1991) unit on generations is poignant and evoked intense and passionate discussion, and tears. It also provided us with insights into how to have children collect data by interviewing and helped us learn more about interviewing children as we considered, with Rief, what constitutes a good question. We talked about what other writers did in order to develop our own writing skills. Writing like Rief's became demonstrations (DeStefano, 1981) of writing as much as they were articles of interest. We were reading for multiple reasons as: teachers, learners, readers, writers, and inquirers. This excerpt from one of our meetings shows the impact of Rief (1991) on our writing and thinking:

> Liz: [When Rief (1991) writes this] her first verb is past tense and then the rest of it is in present. . .
>
> Rick: . . . and she puts the kids in there. She puts whole chunks of their writing right in there and she puts in other poets and short story writers who . . . to get a nice blend of showing the reader . . . like film at 11, here's the film, and you see the classroom. Otherwise you wouldn't cry, you know when you read this article, you wouldn't break down or feel like you wanted to or. . .
>
> Linda: I didn't think I would but I got to the end and I did. That's what got me.
>
> Kim Z: So it would be okay to put an excerpt of kids talking about what they did.
>
> Rick: Absolutely. Um huh [yes], put in their discussions.

> Kim Z: I tried the one about the Japanese hair [Reimer, Stephens, & Smith, 1993]—that business. That's what I tried, that one to me, I liked that one a lot. I liked how she wrote it. So I was trying to you know, model it similar, thinking okay, how did she go through her day, how did she tell me.
>
> Rick: And then an important thing that she does in that work also is she analyzes. She gives you the ten steps or whatever it is that she developed and that's kind of an analytical. . .
>
> Kim Z: Well, I thought about that during parts of this [her own writing of a classroom event] . . . there needs to be more of my reflection on this. . . There needs to be my thought in there somewhere. . . Sort of like after each section or after the very end or you know. . .
>
> Kim R: Or after spending weeks of researching blah-blah-blah, this is how I felt about this or that or the other thing [She's rehearsing (Murray, 1982) her writing aloud in our group.] (Transcript 4.5 @ Ev 4/12/95)

My role as a resource was multifaceted and not limited to our after school meetings. I visited the group's classrooms as much as possible during the full day I spent in the school each Wednesday prior to our class. I was typically the individual who supplied books and articles for the group to read. If Jane had received a new copy of *Young Children* (monthly journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children), she would bring it to show the group. When Linda received her yearbook from ASCD (Beane, 1995), we all read various articles. As a member of a TAWL (Teachers Applying Whole Language) group in another city, I had access to a book store associated with that group; individuals who wanted books that I mentioned or brought to class to show usually had those books in hand within a week.

As I mentioned above, we didn't formally divide into smaller groups, but many times during our sessions individuals would begin small side conversations. We liked being in one circle, on the floor, together, but we also flowed smoothly into smaller groups within the circle. In my field notes I described my role as the passive facilitator:

> While Kim R and I have started a conversation about her piece of writing, on the tape you can hear the voices of other smaller subgroups that start to talk. They are impossible to transcribe because they are so soft spoken; the important thing is that as needs came up in the group, we naturally subgrouped and talked to whomever it was we wanted to address. We'd have to choose who to listen to [i.e., focus in intensely] or it sounded liked the tape: lots of noise [3.2, field notes, 3/8/95]

Listening to the tapes of our sessions, I learned to be more quiet as a researcher and a resource. When one of the teachers was struggling with how to analyze data, she asked, almost rhetorically, how she could organize all she had collected. I responded with great zeal, suggesting that she develop a list of categories:

> Rick: That's how you start, and then, what I do, is I'll make another copy of that whole document so I have it in two places. One, the way I wrote it, when I first sat down and write it so that's preserved. The other one's what I call a working document, and I work on it. I might go through it and use bold or different font and start to categorize it, so I'll take a chunk of that text on to . . . okay, this is about moments that they leave the room to get information some place else. This is about an intense conversation between two people. Here's another moment where they leave the room. Here's another intense conversation. Here's when a new project idea evolved. Here's . . . and so I go through and I have categories for every chunk that seems to be a self-contained or that I could arbitrarily say this is definitely a . . . whatever category I establish. It comes from my notes. Those categories I put all together, so in a new file and in my computer I can cut and paste, so I cut that thing that says . . . let's say it's . . . let's say one thing I want to do is look at conversations between kids rather than who is going through the teacher and teaching. So every chunk that I have that's between kids I'll start a new file called "between kids"

> December 3rd, paste it in. December 6th, paste it in, December 9th, paste it in, so everything that's between kids . . . here's what's starting to happen, the categories that Linda used on her chapter, they're starting to emerge for me because, well, somebody knows my kids talk a lot to each other, and when you read your notes and your thinking, okay, I have to think of like a theme for hits chunk, that's when you're starting to develop major headings, possible major headings for your . . . now a lot of times I'll go through and I'll go this category's not working because I'm not finding any other times where they leave the classroom to go to a resource, they're always going to the same place, they're always going to the media center, so that whole file becomes one sentence: my kids leave a lot to go to the media center and that's it, done deal. But, conversations between each other, if that's a category. . . [Then to write it, you'd find] anything that you want to put in for a kid. You put a post-it on it and you write Figure 1, just arbitrarily number them, Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, and so on. And then you'd have text, text, text, that you've written those notes, notes, and then you skip . . . double space, you write see Figure 1, leave another double space, and then you keep going so that I would know or a reader would know that that's where Figure 1 goes. When we get to the final piece, we'll have the Design Center shrink stuff, move the text up, and they'll do it, you won't have to do that.
> (Transcript 3.2)

If you've read all the above, you can imagine how embarrassed I felt as I listened to the tape of that session and realized how little my lecture helped the teacher in her analysis of data. I was reminded not to play the role of the 'great problem solver'; subsequently, I encouraged individuals to bring data and have us all look at it, talk about it, and suggest ways of organizing, sorting, and analyzing. Part of my role, then, was to learn along with everyone on many levels: as a group facilitator, as a co-researcher, and as a resource.

I worked at bringing the affect in the group to a more public place:

> Rick: [Linda has just read a draft about her growth as a teacher] I'm curious about how you felt reading it because you seemed kind of nervous.

> Linda: Oh I was a wreck, it was really hard for me to share it cause it's just so much part of me. (3.3, Transcript, 3/28/95)

I tried to raise questions about accountability:

> Rick: What if someone asks you, well I'm going to ask you. . .What did the kids learn and how do you assess what they learned? Isn't that part of what you're supposed to do? (3.3, Transcript, 3/28/95)

For all the members of our group, this was the first time that they all sat down together with members of different grade levels, meeting for an extended period of time over many months. As our group discussed, created, and constructed what they needed, our forum became a powerful thought and curriculum collective as ideas were presented and cultivated.

One example of such a cultivation of curriculum was when Liz and Linda explained that their children would be studying our city. The ideas began to flow as folks called out: take them on a bus ride, have them talk to that old man who knows about the capitol building, let them rubbings in a cemetery, get the aerial photo of the city, and more and more and more. Then I said, "What if you did this with the kids? What if the kids could generate questions from their knowledge of the city." I was suggesting that they rely upon the community (classroom's) funds of knowledge (Moll, 19**). Moll suggests that a community can get much done when the members of the community rely upon the collective skills and knowledge of its members. We were doing that about the city; the kids might do the same thing. They could undergo this same process of brainstorming and Liz and Linda might learn about what the kids knew about their city (and didn't know, too), just as we had done in our group. Indeed, members of our class asked: What aerial photo? Who is that old man? Why rubbings in a cemetery? I wondered aloud about having the children engage in a similar process as a pedagogical strategy.

Many of our group members had not been to a large professional conference, larger than a state level International Reading Association conference, so I encouraged them to begin attending and, more recently, to submit proposals to the Whole Language Umbrella and National Council of Teachers of English annual conventions.

I also wrote a small grant to obtain an eight millimeter camcorder, some tapes, some small tape recorders and a laptop computer. We shared these items as they were needed in order to collect data, analyze it, and write.

Being a Researcher

As a researcher, I took copious field notes (Spradley, 1980) at each session. Following each day at the school, I elaborated field notes, looked for emerging themes and read and reread the notes looking for theories to explain why sessions unfolded as they did (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As theories emerged , I used constant comparison as described by Glaser & Strauss to confirm or disconfirm them.

I taped all of the sessions beginning at the third session because I didn't want to rush into taping. I wanted folks to feel comfortable and then I suggested that if I taped our sessions I could understand more of what we were doing. I made transcriptions available to anyone who wanted them (no one did) and had interested members read everything that I wrote before I submitted it for consideration for publication. My goal was to balance the life of a researcher (my own learning) with the life of a resource to teachers because of my commitment to not use the school in an opportunistic fashion, rather to have a mutually beneficial relationship that would sustain itself beyond the years of formal study or, possibly, extend the years of formal study.

The teachers looked to me for ideas of how to do classroom research. When Kim Z tried to write about her morning, she could not re-create the ways in which children talk to her at the beginning of a day. I made a suggestion:

> Rick: Just . . . you know what you could do, pay attention tomorrow, what do kids say to you when they come in in the morning, and just start to make . . . walk around with a little 3 by 5 card and make little notes and find an interaction that you like [and write it down].
>
> Kim: Oh. Yeah, and I mean these questions came from things that have stuck out in my mind before, and then I didn't . . .
>
> Rick: Yeah, right.
>
> Kim: . . . I mean, I'm sure it was D-- that was asking if they really do that, because he would be concerned about that here, he's such a fragile little thing. And A-- always brings her shells, I mean, probably once a week she brings her shells, [I could write] stuff like that. Transcript, SD@Ev 4/26/95

My role in the group was, above all else, to live the school experience with the group of teachers that I was coming to respect, know, love, and learn with. As I felt increasingly accepted as a friend, confident, and resource, I learned about life at Elmwood as an insider (Agar, 1980). The essence (Van Manen, 1990) of my learning is described in the sections below.

Jane

Three years before our project began, the district hired Jane as the early childhood consultant. Consultants in the district are responsible for developing and implementing curriculum. Jane helped the district develop an early childhood philosophy statement that is developmentally appropriate (Bredekamp, 1987). She was instrumental in developing the process by which schools could become Research and Development sites within the district and helped select Elmwood as one of the first two

schools to undergo the R & D process. Jane attended about half of our sessions.

Jane has a lot of energy and works hard to support teachers who are learning about how children learn. She wasn't afraid to ask difficult questions. When Kim L and Kim R opened the wall between their two first grade classrooms, Jane asked them about issues of attachment because she wondered if the children were getting their emotional needs met when Kim L and Kim R seemed to make two smaller classes into one large one. She also provided funds for bookshelves, books, and other materials as the need for such materials were expressed. Her role, then, was broad encompassing theory and pragmatics.

Jane helped our group focus on accountability because she wanted material and results to present to the board of education and to the other consultants in the disciplines (science, social studies, reading, language arts etc.). She often asked the group how they could demonstrate their progress as teachers and the students' "increased learning."

Jane also provided funds for a variety of professional resources. She paid for substitute teachers so that members of our group could visit other schools, attend conferences, and meet with each other in small groups with their individual teams. Some of her funds paid for presenters brought to the district at the teachers' request or because Jane had made contact with them at conventions or through other consultants.

Readings

Our group was voracious readers . We read pieces by Crowell (1993), Perrone (1991), complete issues of Primary Voices (Reimer, Stephens, & Smith, 1993), Wells' (et al., 1993), Dewey (1938), Rief (1991), a group of articles from the Kappan (19**) that focused on inclusion, McLaren

(1989), Katz (1994), parts of the ASCD yearbook (Beane, 1995), and more. In addition, individuals read Avery (1993), Graves(1991), Short & Harste with Burke (1988), Harwayne (1992), and Calkins (1994). Individuals shared their learning and excitement by reporting to us on their reading.

An individual's sharing might emanate from points at which disagree with the author, agree with the author, discover something that they didn't know or hadn't thought of, or because they resonate with something the author said. As Kim R read more and more of Avery (1993), her excitement increased. She had found another teacher-writer who was learning that children need to construct their learning and their learning environment.

> Kim R: Uh huh. Well this is one example they are talking about room arrangement and how when you have your room totally ready and you know, the kids haven't had any say in what you do. You have the desks here and you have all the things up on the walls. And everything's ready and beautiful and she said "When tempted to do too much, I remember Lisa, a first-grader from years ago who one day in late March pointed to a word taped to a window and asked 'Mrs. Avery, why is that word on the window?' The word window, I taped it there and obviously Lisa had no idea what it said or why it was there. The children must understand the purpose of everything in the classroom and so now what goes up are items connected to classroom learning." (Avery, 1993) (Transcription, 4.3 EV 3/28/95)

Our readings were more than informative. They provided support for us as we found *both* other teachers who are learners *and* researchers' work that encouraged us as we changed our practices.

Living and Changing in a School and District

We are not the first group of teachers to find that change takes place in a context (Wilson, 1994; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Life at Elmwood was easy and hard during our first year of intensive study together. In

this section, I present some of the issues with which we dealt in order to make sense of the context in which we researched, taught, and learned.

We needed to devote some of each class session to 'life at Elmwood.' Had this been a typical staff development or university course, the time devoted to this issue might have been considerably less because teachers from different schools tend to summarize, gloss over, or choose not to disclose 'troubles at home' (meaning their home school). The following sections present issues for individuals, small groups of teachers, the whole school, and the district that were discussed in our group.

Individuals' Issues Related to Life at Elmwood: All Teachers Try to Keep Their Children Warm

Kim Z was very upset that she was disrupting the usual activity within her team. The team leader of the four second grade rooms is Kim's good friend and Kim felt that their friendship was being threatened by Kim's changes in teaching. Kim didn't want to follow the curricular schedule that the team built; she wanted curriculum created with her children (Short and Burke, 1991) and wanted it to have an inquiry base (Short & Harste with Burke, 1996). As our year progressed, Kim Z decided that she "wants to be pushed next year" and that the first grade team is the place for that to happen. She decided to approach Mr. Z with the idea of her moving to the first grade team. That was eventually approved by Mr. Z and celebrated at a class meeting.

Although Kim Z's team was being disrupted to the point of looking at changes in composition for the next year, Liz's third grade team was not. There was frustration, but not to the point of the team physically splitting apart:

> Liz: I was getting real frustrated in probably October. And I can remember one team member going "This is just too much for me, I can't do everything . . ."she just ranted and raved and then it was over, you know? But she felt comfortable enough with us to just rant and rave and cuss a little bit. And then we said "Yeah, I'm feeling like that too." I felt like this, "Is where I'm at?" and we kind of processed that. (Transcript 5.6b Ev 4/19/95)

We were making sense of what was happening to the teams throughout the school as things changed; folks were abandoning the district curriculum, relationships were changing, and classrooms were becoming different places. Perhaps what was happening is best explained by Lester and Onore (1990):

> The possibility for change in this school was intricately tied to both empowerment of teachers to initiate changes though a commitment to new ways of seeing teaching and learning as well as the involvement of an administrator in an intellectual understanding and commitment to the implications of those changes. . .
> . . .when experimentation begins to occur in many isolated classrooms and when experimentation begins to reveal the impossibility of reconciling institutional demands with individual goals and to exaggerate the inadequacies and contradictions of an eclectic approach to learning, the individual teacher's decisions or choices simultaneously begin conditioning the larger school community. Collective action and change on the level of teacher's worldviews can come to influence the institution. Rather than having a teacher's choices controlled by the institutional practice, the institutional practice can come to reflect the collective beliefs and practices of teachers. (pp. 190-191)

Other individuals in our group talked about our work and how it was affecting them within their teams. Kim R said that, "Jackie [another first grade teacher, pseudonym] has put up a real wall. She's been against us from the beginning and she's just bound and determined that what she's doing is not projects [inquiry]." They struggled with maintaining peace; for example, at a team meeting Kim L asked Jackie to talk about something that Jackie was doing with her students and Kim R said, "And it

was good that you got her to share today about some things that she does" (SD 5.6b 4/19/95). In spite of this, there was a growing sense of insiderness (those teachers in the study group) and outsiderness (those not); although we did maintain an open door policy, we received no visitors or newcomers except for a one-time visit from the computer teacher.

Our group came to care about one another on a personal level, too, as evidenced by our careful watching of Linda as her husband got sicker:

> Rick: Are other folks coming?
>
> Liz: Where is everybody?
>
> Rick: How's Linda's husband?
>
> Nancy: She brought him to the hospital today.
>
> Kim L: I saw her leaving this morning.
>
> Nancy : And that she's going to be gone the rest of this week. He . . . basically, he wasn't eating, so they brought him . . . she brought him into the hospital, and now she has to basically be there to give him food, to regulate his intake so she's going to stay home and do that with him . . . and if he doesn't start . . .
>
> Kim L: Is it because of that chemo and stuff they got in him, or . . .
>
> Kim Z: He just doesn't want to. . .
>
> Kim L: Just doesn't want to.
>
> Kim Z: Yea, I think he's just so exhausted, he just . . . (Transcription 5.1 3/8/95 pt 1)

We spent time making sense of the new leadership at Elmwood because it was a safer environment than it had been previously. Kim Z had a difficult time with the principal that was at Elmwood before Mr. Z. That

principal made Kim Z feel quite vulnerable and led to her being hospitalized with an ulcer during one spring break. The teachers in our group reminded each other of the change:

> Kim Z: I mean there's differences in the building and yet. . . I think most of us get along fairly well.
>
> Rick: I. . . you can correct me if I'm wrong because you all live here, but I used to think that leadership had nothing to do with that and that the principal. . . it's like teachers did what they wanted and we're all such independent souls and just knowing you. . . I wasn't here when the former principal was here. . . but just knowing you and seeing your difference as far as they way you view yourself and what you do and other experiences that I've had with leadership, I'm just starting to feel that leadership is so important. I hate to admit how important it is because I want to think of the independent teacher being. . .
>
> Liz: . . . but you've got to have that support behind you because that person controls your job.
>
> Rick: Yeah.
>
> Kim Z: Well, and I got called on something today that ended up being somewhat of a misunderstanding but I didn't feel like I was getting in trouble, you know what I mean? I felt like he needed to bring this to my attention as a professional, here's what I need to say to you, what do you need to say to me? Okay, I respect you for that, we're okay, smile and I'll say hi to you still in the hallway later on and you know it has no bearing on your job and I don't think. . .
>
> Liz: And no tears.
>
> Kim Z: Right and not tears, my stomach doesn't hurt, you know.
>
> Rick: You used to come to class [as a graduate student two years ago in an on-campus course that I taught] and I thought you'd been spanked and sent to your room.
>
> Kim Z: I was in the hospital over a spring break with an ulcer one spring because of it. I mean it's a lot different. It makes a ton of difference.

> Rick: . . .a principal changes a school . . . the tone of the whole building. I hate to admit that! But it's being really borne out.
>
> Kim Z: Right. (Transcription From 5.5 Ev 4/12/95)

I do not want to paint too rosy of a picture because, as demonstrated below, the principal made decisions that hurt people. The point here is that our group helped individuals live their lives, and make sense of their lived experiences, at Elmwood.

And, within that context, we could never forget that "we are who we teach and we teach who we are" (Meyer, 1996). Our personal lives, saturating our teaching, reading, writing, researching, and learning, were part of our group. Kim Z summarized it quite well:

> Kim Z: I think that's true though. Now that you say that, I never really thought about that but maybe that's why this year is better for me too in a sense. I mean there for a while, my life was just a wreck, I mean, relationship-wise and stuff and now I've been married a year and kind of calmed down, you know. Things are okay that way. You know, you kind of wonder if that makes a difference. (Transcription 5.6 @ Ev 4/19/95)

And we didn't neglect to celebrate our successes:

> Linda: You know it's the way to do it when you have kids come to school everyday and they're disappointed when Friday they can't come. Monday we made that announcement. "Friday we have another day off?" "Can't we come?" [the kids asked]. You know, and I had quite a few. I know I'm doing something right. I never had that before this year. I knew I'm doing something right when I had those kinds of comments [from kids]. (Transcript 5.7 SD @ EV4/26/95)

Mona was the most convinced that things at Elmwood were always happening for the best, for the children and the teachers. She believed that the children sensed this as much as she did.

> Mona: It is [a great place to teach], and I know if it [a day at school] was just horrible I could come to any of you and it would be okay. And . . . the kids are so antsy this time of year, it was a rainy day, was it Monday? We walked the long way around back to our classroom, by our new classroom in back [Mona's multiage classroom would be in a different room next year], and I said, "We're going on a detective walk, and I just want you to think about what you're seeing and then be able to write it down when you get back to class." And this is what Ben wrote: "We went on a detective walk around the school. I saw ladders outside. When we returned I realized that some things are the same." I said, "Ben, clarify that. What exactly do you mean by that?" He means our classroom and the other classrooms in the school building. And he wrote, "All of the classrooms do studies, all teachers try to keep their children warm. (Transcription, 5.9 SD@EV5/14/95)

Our group also relied upon each other for some of the nitty gritty of teaching. For example, one member wanted to know if it was possible to have an inquiry group of one because only one child wanted to research a particular area while another wanted support in changing the furniture arrangement in her room. We encouraged each other to listen to the students to learn about how the schedule might meet their needs more effectively. We had the contrast that Mona could offer from a Montessori perspective, Jane's views on attachment, Kim R and Kim L on moving walls, and more.

Kim Z wanted support in using time differently in her classroom:

> Kim Z: Well, and I know that I wouldn't have been as successful as I have been with what's going on in my classroom if I didn't have these guys [Kim R and Kim L], because they've been doing it for a whole semester, and I feel brave enough finally to say, "I can do what they're doing," you know, but they've tried out, they've tried some of the management things, the procedure . . . I mean, I can go to them and, "Did you do this, will it work?", you know, and that's helpful. (Kim Z, Transcript 8.2
> EV 3/8/95)

We faced more than individual issues.

Group Issues Related to Life at Elmwood

Our group felt vulnerable because we were, to some extent, polarizing the school, as mentioned above. One of the upper grade teachers complained to Mr. Z at a faculty meeting that the younger children at Elmwood (below grade four) were doing "a lot of fluff," rather than the important curricular activities that would get them "ready" for the upper grades. Our group time that afternoon was spent venting some of the anger felt towards the upper grades and justifying practices that folks were enacting. Mr. Z told the group that there would be a meeting of all individuals involved (essentially the entire school staff) in what he called a "circle meeting"; the staff would sit in a large circle and listen to each other. Mr. Z was good at this sort of thing; our time together that afternoon was spent rehearsing for the circle meeting. The following week I learned that, although the feelings were made public and no one seemed swayed, the facing of each other defused some of the tension because Mr. Z validated the entire staff.

The issue of teams, discussed as they affected individuals, would not go away, as the group began to analyze the beliefs upon which they thought teaming rested.

> Kim R: But nobody understands that we would love to know. . . But I'm really saying that I think the biggest change has come since we sectioned our building off into teams. . . . 5th grade team has their meetings and 1st grade team, and it's like you all have to be doing the same thing and you all have to be exactly alike and that's a lot. . .
>
> Rick: Is that true of teams in this building?
>
> Kim L: Not any more, but I think. . .
>
> Kim Z: Initially, I think that's what [the former principal] wanted.

Rick: Oh was it?

Kim R: That's what we were.

Kim Z: She loved our team. She loved how we all planned together.

Kim R: She liked us because that's how we did it, too. We all planned everything together. We had the same thing divided up into the same exact things. We ran off for everybody in the team. We ran out all the centers. Math was the same. I mean now what this has done is we're all going our own ways so we're not that little team that does every thing together. You see what I'm saying?

Rick: Yeah. The team is very different now.

Kim R: I think it's divided our school.

Rick: Well, your team's also divided [within each team as individuals wanted to go in different directions].

Kim L: That's what I mean.

Liz: It hasn't for us in that we've talked. . .

Linda: For a long time. You and I [to Liz] talked together for a long time.

Kim R : The word 'team'. . . team to [some people] means we're our own little group that we all have to be doing the same exact thing. And that's not what a team is. A team is for sharing and doing this kind of stuff, support, and ideas. A team is not to be "Well, here's my idea that I'll copy for all of you." . . .
We had the same thing divided up into the same exact things. We ran off for everybody in the team. We ran off all the centers [photocopied for all team members]. Math was the same. I mean now what this has done, is we're all going our own ways so we're not that little team that does every thing together. You see what I'm saying? (Transcription 5.6b 4/19/95)

Teaming appears, in the eyes of some of our group members, to be a vehicle for a principal to control teachers and to guarantee that

curriculum is homogenous across classrooms. Our group was coming to terms with this as they began to view teaming as a push toward mediocrity.

Whole School Issues Related to Life at Elmwood

School issues affected all teachers at the school, including our group's members. One example of this was when Mr. Z made a decision for the school, something he is entitled to do within the district's definition of site-based management. There are enough children identified as 'special education' students at Elmwood to support one full time special education teacher per grade level (each grade level is a team). Mr. Z suggested that they have the special education teacher become a classroom teacher, disperse all the special education students among all the classrooms of each grade level and have smaller classes. For example, the first grade had originally thought they would have sixty students distributed among their three classrooms with a fourth classroom for the special education teacher. That teacher would have pulled kids out for special instruction or she might include the children in the regular classroom and work with those students in their own classrooms during the day.

Instead, all of the children (including the special education students) were distributed evenly among the four teachers, giving each teacher fifteen students. The classroom teacher, with the help of the special education teacher, would write the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the special education students in her classroom. The teachers liked having smaller classes, but the ones in our group felt uncomfortable including certain special education students in their classrooms because they did not know enough about how these children learn and didn't feel they were getting the support they needed in finding out. They weren't sure they

wanted to continue the plan into the 1995-1996 school year. Mr. Z decided that the plan would be continued. According to our group, he did not consult with any of the teachers when he made this plan. This led us to read about the success and failure of inclusion (Kappan, 19**). Although the group did not agree to any action upon John's decisions, their reading and discussing helped them ventilate and also helped them plan for the special education students in their classrooms.

As the school year was drawing to a close, Mr. Z made other staffing decisions. Kim Z would teach first grade and one first grade teacher would move to the second grade team. It turns out that Kim L and Kim R, first grade teachers, were making the woman who wanted to move feel uncomfortable in that she was excluded from their planning and teaching. The exclusion was mutual as Kim R and Kim L kept inviting the other two first grade teachers 'in', but they didn't respond; they wanted to continue teaching as they always had. They viewed themselves as good teachers, and didn't want to spend time learning new things when they already felt successful (see Hendricks-Lee, Soled, & Yinger, 1995 for a discussion of the distinction between teachers as teachers and teachers as learners).

We wound up discussing staffing in an interesting way; staffing decisions that Mr. Z makes, it turned out, were carefully chosen and complex. In addition to moving Kim Z to support her growth as a teacher, he wanted to move a kindergarten teacher out of her classroom; he also wanted Nancy to use more of her special education training so he moved her into a more specialized position. We talked considerably about these decisions at our class meeting. Mr. Z was moving people whom group members suspected he might want out of the school. The kindergarten teacher and Nancy both moved to different schools when opportunities to

do so arose over the summer. John's rational, always publicly stated, is that he wants people in positions where they can do the most good for the kids at Elmwood. He is willing to "eat it" when there is anger about a move that he makes; he knows some people don't agree with the decisions he makes, but he assumes full responsibility.

Those Little Things. . .

Our meetings took place in the school and were affected by that context. There were announcements paging staff because of phone calls, the assistant principal tracking down a child who didn't show up at home because he hadn't gotten on his bus, calls for the janitor to attend to something in the building, and brief visits by Mr. Z or other teachers who needed to talk to the sponsor of the meeting but didn't know that our whole group would be in her room. I mention these so that other groups trying to organize a study collective like ours will not become discouraged by these background incidents. They add some tension to getting focused, but holding our meeting in the school made it quite accessible to those interested in attending. We were also right at the site of teachers' changing thinking and practices.

Teacher-Reported Changes

Our group was a powerful forum for thought and discussion as we read, collected data on ourselves and our classrooms, and analyzed the data (individually and within our group). We shared the successive drafts of the narratives that presented our learning; a major focus of our discussions was change. Teachers' change involved personal/professional relationships, developing curriculum, record keeping, and changing roles

that they were assuming within the school and the district as a result of their work.

The changes that our group experienced within and beyond the classroom reflected growth towards inquiry and movement away from prescribed curriculum for students. We were discovering what it means to be an "abiding student of education", as described by Dewey (1904):

> The tendency of educational development to proceed by reaction from one thing to another, to adopt for one year, or for a term of seven years, this or that new study or method of teaching, and then as abruptly to swing over to some new education gospel, is a result which would be impossible if teachers were adequately moved by their own independent intelligence. The willingness of teachers, especially of those occupying administrative positions, to become submerged in the routine detail of their callings, to expend the bulk of their energy upon forms and rules and regulations, and reports and percentages, is another evidence of the absence of intellectual vitality. If teachers were possessed by the spirit of an abiding student of education, this spirit would find some way of breaking through the mesh and coil of circumstance and would find expression for itself. (p. 26)

Creating Curriculum

Our group explored ways of changing curriculum; the time spent on such an endeavor was a philosophical shift in thinking about curriculum, reflected even in the use of time to plan:

> Kim R: We were so accustomed to planning each day in its entirety, that this new idea took some getting used to. The first change we made was in the way we utilized our daily plan time. Instead of sitting down to plan for the children, we sat down to collaborate with each other, other professionals, and the children. Together we sat down to plan, create, and sustain a safe environment in which children could work harmoniously, creatively and productively. We also found that we needed to provide children with time, opportunities, and a wide range of different experience, with different ways to interact, reflect, and communicate. This meant giving . . . revising the schedule from one that was very teacher

> dominated to one that gave children large blocks of time to work in small groups on projects and other student-centered activities. (Transcript 6.7 SD @ EV4/26/95, reading her write up)

Group members changed their classroom schedules, allowing for larger blocks of time for children to pursue interests and co-create curriculum. They began to listen to kids differently, as Kim Z notes reflecting on her changing ways of paying attention to potential curricular avenues:

> Kim Z: Maybe in the past if I would have had this unit planned, and I would have had in my mindset this is what we're going to do, this is what I have planned. By golly, we're sticking to this lesson plan, I don't know . . . I don't know that I would have done this, but one might just, you know, brush those off with just an answer there and never go onto it or explore it any. (Transcript 6.7 SD @ EV4/26/95)

Kim Z's thinking resonates with Dewey (1932):

> The plan, in other words, is a cooperative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions for the experience of all engaged in the learning process. . . . The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence. (p.72)

Kim L, Kim R, and Kim Z focused on child-developed projects. Kim Z tended to have the project focus around one theme (Arctic life); Kim R and Kim L focused on the broad spectrum of the children's expressed interests. At one time, Kim L and Kim R had groups, within and across their classrooms, studying: rats, sharks, the basement of the school, snakes, and the human body. These emerged from a discussion around the time of Halloween. The children were seated in the large rug area, with both classes tighter, discussing Halloween, when the conversation turned to things that frighten us.

> Kim R: We could study things that frighten us. Let's make a list of these things.
>
> Kim L: What does scare you?

Student 1: Snakes. Ooohhh, they are scary.

Student 2: Rats. Rats are really scary. [Kim R has a piece of chart paper and is writing things that scare kids. . . the list is growing to about ten things.] . . .

Student 12: The basement of the school is very scary. There are spiders down there. If one of those spiders pee on you [his body becomes rigid and talks through clenched jaws], you can't move. Like this.

Kim L: Is that what happens?

Student 12: Yeah.

Kim R: Well, let's add that to the list. Remember, these are things that we can study in our classroom to understand them and see what makes them scary.

Student 8: I don't want to study that stuff. I want to know about the human body. I want to know about bones.

Kim L: You can do that, too.

The conversation continues and the list grows. Some students want scary things on the list, others prefer things that are interesting, but not scary. Kim L and Kim R welcome all the areas of study that interest the children. Later in the week, children will choose which area to study. Kim L and Kim R will help them form groups to focus on four or five of these areas, explaining that the children need join a group because pursuing too many individual interests is not possible due to lack of adult help. The children don't balk; they are quite willing to study something with their friends.

Kim R explains how the curriculum was developed with the children:

Kim R: We [Kim L and Kim R] observed them and wrote down what they were saying to hear what they were interested in, and then we went to brainstorming after . . . "this is what we heard when you guys were talking". And then we went to [the large group and had] them choose something they were really interested in and then went

> into the groups. Then brainstormed again and . . . first we webbed yesterday we webbed. I said, " Earth, tell me about it", and we just webbed and they told me about it, volcanoes and caves and mountains and all the stuff came up, and then after we looked at it . . . "I see more spider legs," Z-- said, "spider legs around caves." I said, "You're right, I wonder why?" Teresa goes," and that's what I want to learn about," you know, it was bingo.
> Rick: She knows [what she wants to learn about]. (Transcript 14.2 / EV 3/8/95)

Nancy worked with her class, inspired by the work of Kim Z, Kim L and Kim R, to cultivate the children's interest in opening a restaurant. Nancy's class was completing the study of our city as the part of the district-mandated curriculum when a discussion of restaurants began. Nancy listened, cultivated the conversation, and the helped the children piece together what they would need to open their own restaurant. They decided on a Mexican theme, reflective of the interest and ethnicity of the class, and eventually opened (for two days) a restaurant that served their friends and families an authentic Mexican lunch. Nancy incorporated talent and knowledge from within the class and the community and collected the children's learning and growth using record keeping devices that she developed. Her artifacts included their written pieces: menus, signs, recipes, invitations, letters home, thank you notes, wall decorations, video tape, and more. She videotaped the children cooperatively designing logos and place mats and organizing the classroom space.

Mona studied the written language program in her Montessori classroom, rediscovering herself as a writer in the process of supporting the young writers with whom she worked. Montessori, as Mona explained it, rested in a very phonic-based approach to writing. Mona wanted the written language of the classroom to reflect more of the spiritual and

aesthetic facets of Montessori. Reading Calkins (1994) inspired Mona to bring the Montessori writing curriculum into the present.

Liz and Linda studied their children as the children studied our city. This led to a rather intense retracing of their teaching careers as they tried to uncover what entices them to be teachers who are learners (Hendricks et al., 1995). They also encouraged their students to be learners and seek out sources and resources in the community that would enhance that learning, such as securing a visit from the president of the chamber of commerce.

Our group's reading and making sense of language and literacy led to reported changes in classroom activity. For example, Liz was worried that her kids were not reading enough books:

> Liz: But I feel frustrated that they're not reading enough because when it comes to book club it's just "Let's just do our play." But today there were 3 or 4 around a tape recorder reading, you know, it's reading. (Transcription 6.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

She realized that reading is more than just books; it is reading when children read their own writing, too.

Linda changed her understanding of what it means to immerse children in language:

> Linda: . . .we study Jack Prelutsky as an author and I found even my quote "nonreader" can read the poems that they have over and over again and I never thought about that. . . And I don't know why I never picked up on this. . . And I can't wait to do it because my ESL kids can even read the lines of poetry. (Transcription 6.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

The teachers work in curriculum development did pay attention to the district mandated curriculum. Yet, by allowing the children to focus on areas of interest, the teachers in our group found curricular goals being covered while excitement and areas of interest were being uncovered.

Pam did not attend regularly, but she was instrumental in getting the R & D proposal together at Elmwood. She left at the end of the year to take a two year job helping twelve other schools initiate the process of studying themselves and setting goals for change that are consistent with the district's early childhood philosophy. As the teacher in the early childhood special education classroom, Pam initiated some inquiry activities with her students. Essentially, she reminded us that "a child at play is a head taller (Vygotsky, 1978). Her students were immersed in addressing their curiosities every day in a play-rich environment that Pam and her co-teacher created for the four year olds in their classroom.

Record Keeping

The teachers in our group became much more systematic record keepers. Some developed portfolios for themselves, their classrooms, and the children. The children's portfolios were, in most cases, owned by the children. The children made decisions about what to place in their portfolios. The classroom portfolios were maintained by the teachers. Others took extensive anecdotal records on their children, as the sought to become kidwatchers (Goodman, 1985). They audio taped children reading and talking, videotaped classroom activities on a regular basis, and developed record keeping sheets to keep track of specific areas that they were interested in studying.

Plans were made to share some of these ways of keeping track of children with their parents:

> Nancy: Well, and I think next year, with my portfolios I wanted to do this this year, but I just don't think I can get it done. I want to have portfolio nights and portfolio open houses. And I really thought I was going to pull one off this spring, but I don't know yet. I mean, I still might in May, I don't know. But I feel like they don't have

enough time at conferences to really just go through everything about their portfolio. (Transcript 6.4 Elmwood 4/5/95)

Kim Z began extensive record keeping when her students decided to study the zoo in our city. She felt pressure to keep track of her students in order to present to other teachers in the district, but yielded to the more immediate pressure of understanding what is happening in her classroom, to her own thinking, and to recording what the children are learning:

> Kim Z: I don't know what it's for [all her notes, organized in a notebook]. I thought it would be for maybe if we ever went and talked with [other teachers at their schools]. Because what I started doing was I kept a journal and I had thoughts and reflections for each month and I tried to write at the end of each month about each area. But I quit, I mean I haven't. Some areas I still do, I still keep track of and some areas I kind of haven't, you know? But then I started this other thing. I remember where it's at; it's in my other bag, I have three bags, see, look. And it's the journal of the zoo stuff and I've been keeping that day by day. . . I've been making copies of everybody's stuff practically, so I have lots of authentic kids' stuff. (Transcript 6.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

The district requires that teachers list the units or themed areas that they studied during the year. Linda and Liz reported exciting changes from years gone by:

> Linda: We were able to even talk about, you know, when we went to fill out the reading cards, we talked about this yesterday, we said, okay, what units have we covered? We didn't have enough room to cover all our units. We had to pick and choose. What I thought was cool, too, during that . . . when you were pulling that out, we asked the kids, well, what did you study? What did you read about? And the cards were all different. It wasn't just something you could have run off and put for the class. Well, I studied . .
>
> Liz: And personal goals. Everybody met a personal goal this time, and they all knew what they were and, "yeah, I did it," and they could prove it [because they had a product to show that they were proud of . . . (Transcript 6.9 SD@EV5/14/95)

Changing Roles in the District: Becoming a District Resource

Word travels fast in this district. Jane, as the early childhood consultant, visited all the schools within the district and lauded the success that Kim R and Kim L had as they supported their first graders in inquiry. By February, teachers from other schools were visiting Kim L and Kim R in their classrooms, often frustrating "the Kims" because they were trying to teach first grade and entertain visitors at the same time:

> Kim R: Well, that's why these guys shut us off as soon as they saw how we had our rooms, they shut us off. And I kept saying, this is not the only way to do projects. Look at C---'s room. Talk to Kim Z. There's lots of different models of doing projects [inquiry]. (Transcript 6.2 3/8/95 at Ev)

As an increasing number of teachers visited their classrooms, the teachers in our group became frustrated at times. They were confronted with teachers who believed that the district office was sending the message that all teachers in the district needed to look like the teachers at Elmwood. The teachers in our group were uncomfortable with this for many reasons. They believed that each member of the group teaches differently; there's no pattern or template to follow. They were basing their teaching on their experience and their collective thinking as expressed individually within their own unique classrooms. They became annoyed with visitors who wanted a guide for replication:

> Liz: People will not change unless they want to. That's why this just stuck out at me, you know? We have to provide the opportunity for that change to come from within rather than trying to impose it from without.
>
> Kim R: But you can look at those classrooms that do it because they think it's ***the*** way to do it. . .
>
> Kim Z: Or because somebody else is doing it, so they're just kind of copying.

Liz: Right, they copy what you're doing. . .

Kim R: but they don't have any reason for why they're doing it.

Kim Z: No philosophies . . .

Kim R: They don't understand what's happening and what they're looking for. (Transcript 6.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

The fundamental purpose of our group was support. We supported each other in a multitude of ways which will be described in the following sections.

Our Group as a Source of Support

Our group supported each other in many ways. We dealt with personal issues, curriculum, expression of self in writing, data, assessment, questions, and discoveries. We shared in the joys and sorrows of our learning lives.

Roles Within The Group

Earlier, I described the roles that Jane, Pam, and I assumed in our group. In this section, I describe some of the roles of the teachers. Our group was fortunate to have two very sensitive and intense teachers who helped launch our intensity. Kim R and Kim L taught next door to each other for five years. Their relationship extends well beyond the doors of the school as they know about each others' lives, share in those lives, and are each others' best friends. Kim L was supported by Kim R in many ways when Kim L divorced her husband. They phone each other at least once each evening, work-out together at a local aerobics exercise gym, and plan some graduate work in such a way as to be in each others' class.

The year of our study together, they opened the accordion door between their classrooms and the children (and their teachers, Kim L and Kim R) established the double classroom as a mutually shared space. They had a rug area where both classes could meet together for short gatherings to do the calendar, to sing, and to listen to stories. They truly team-taught at this time as the conversations flowed across and between children and teachers.

They supported each others' ideas as a thought collective and developed ways to evaluate and assess children, engaged in in-depth case studies of a specific child about whom they were concerned, or study a particular facet of their classroom, such as portfolio assessment. For our group, their relationship served as a demonstration as to what a team could do. Their willingness to share in front of us their growth and struggles inspired the group to do the same. They demonstrated safety, willingness to take risks in front of a group, and desire to challenge their extant practice. Others could feel their energy and wanted to experience their intensity on a personal level, within their own classrooms. Their relationship supported all the members of the group by demonstrating encouragement, conversation, and bravery.

Kim Z relished having Kim R and Kim L as colleagues. She didn't like when the two were grouped together as "the Kims" because she thought that each was brilliant in her own way:

> Kim Z: A lot of people don't know that about you two, though. I think they think that you two are the same but you're not, you're not at all. And then, I think I can say that because I used to teach across the hall from Kim so I got to watch her a lot, when I first started teaching. And I mean both your rooms are different and then it just blends well. But it's not the same. I hate it when people say that [you're the same]. (Transcription 9.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

The three Kims' relationship developed (and Kim Z's relationship with her second grade team deteriorated) over our months together to the point that Kim Z requested a transfer to the first grade team in the coming school year in order to be continually challenged and to challenge right back.

Our group was serious about 'why' and 'how'. We asked each other what our decisions were based upon and how we would carry out our thinking. Mona approached things in a very spiritual way and would often talk about the 'feel' and 'energy' of things that were happening. She demonstrated how to teach intuitively and how an intuitive teacher learns.

Liz and Linda were also close friends. They, like Kim R and Kim L, were making their friendship public within our group. Their deep respect and sensitivity for each other also supported them as they challenged each other, other members of the group, and also pushed each other to try new things.

Nancy was experiencing her first year as a classroom teacher. Having Liz and Linda as teammates proved to be quite positive for her; she often commented on how much she was learning from them. Nancy was very quiet, too. She hesitated to share her writing but loved sharing orally about the experiences her children were having in creating a restaurant. She seemed to appreciate that we would challenge what she was doing and, simultaneously, help her in addressing the challenges. For example, I asked her how she would explain the educative usefulness of opening a restaurant. We worked as a group to tease out what we all intuitively knew about what Nancy's students were learning.

> Nancy: They learned incredibly a lot. They learned what cooperative learning. . . they worked together and that wasn't real easy for some

of them but they really did a good job cause it's hard sometimes being in a group especially when you have different opinions. And they learned to work with each other on those opinions to make a plan. They did research, they went out into the community . . writing skills,. . . their creative skills by creating the room, by coloring as to where this goes on the wall so they visualized their room. People skills, they learned a lot of people skills, as far as politeness, forms, the menu was a form and the ticket was a form.

Rick: Did they do job applications?

Nancy: Job applications, filling out that.

Liz: They designed it plus they had to fill it out and had to know all sorts of spelling and information.

Nancy: And computer skills.

Rick: And do you feel pressure between all that you just described and what the district says is "curriculum". Is there tension there or is it just like this is fine, it all fits?

Nancy: I think because I'm new, I don't really know the curriculum to a tee.

Rick: Is that like ignorance is bliss? (Laughter)

Nancy: Yeah, but when I read through for my own purpose sometimes I read through and go yes, yes, yes. I can check off some of the curriculum things but I don't know. I guess sometimes I feel like well if somebody came into the classroom and probably saw what was happening, would they be able to see these things and I still think they would be able to see them although I'm not up there standing and the kids are just listening. They are actually moving around and stuff. I still think we could see curriculum. (Transcript 14 .3 SD@EV3/28/95)

We reminded each other to look at the district curriculum, not as something that confines but as a sort of minimalist document of expectations:

Kim Z: You need to know those objectives, and you need to go . . . sometimes, I mean, you need to go to that curriculum just to say, oh, I get it, this is what they mean by that objective. Doesn't necessarily mean you're going to use all that material to teach it, but I mean when I first started teaching I was like . . .(Transcript 4.7 SD@Ev 4/26/95)

In the following interchanges, we can see the roles we took in the group. Individuals move from a question, to sharing an event, to seeking clarification, to gaining information, to having an idea realized before us:

Nancy: Also, too, as for our speakers, I was going to ask you, what do you do if you want a speaker? Do you have the kids just write a letter, and then do you also contact them, or how do you do that?

Kim R: The letters. They didn't see that, but they wrote the letter and I put a cover letter on it and sent it.

Nancy: Okay, okay. Because I wasn't sure.

Kim R: The kids did see that, though.

Rick: Yea, I think you need a cover letter on school stationary so they know that it's not frivolous.

Nancy: Yea, it's real.

Kim R: And I also . . . they were going to call the restaurant, and I called prior and said this person's going to be calling in 15 minutes and this is what they're talking about, so . . .

Nancy: Okay, so did . . . I was going to do that, but then . . .

Rick: For the ground work.

Kim Z: One thing you need to do, I meant to bring mine . . . I'll bring them next time, I sent home a parent letter after we got done with the Arctic stuff and kind of explained to parents that this is a different way of teaching and that some refer to it as the project approach, and this is why I chose to do it this way, and I would like your input, and I asked them like . . . I asked what . . . if their child talked to them more about this, seemed more excited about this learning as previous teacher directed things, and I asked them,

> have you visited the learning bubble, what did you think, and other comment, and I've got to bring them, because I've got the nicest comments, I mean, whenever I'm feeling bad I'm going to get those out because, I mean, it . . . just some incredible comments from parents. And one mother, who I'd never expected . . . and previously didn't know that much about her, really talked to me about . . . obviously she's going to schooling, and talked about, "This reminds me of cooperative group work," and da-da-da-da, and she's read this person, and I . . . I mean, what a dialogue to get going between me and a parent, you know, so you need to write some kind of follow-up to send home after you've had parents in, I mean, it's great feedback. I just . . .
>
> Nancy: [Nancy responds with an idea she has.] What I was going to do this week is write a letter explaining kind of the different committees and a little bit about what they've done, and then say that . . . and then telling them when their restaurant opens, because it's basically for parents, and telling them when the restaurant is open so it gives them a couple of weeks, and . . . if they need to make arrangements they can. Then, also too talk about like write the menu down, so that way . . . and say if there's anything you'd like to help us with, please feel free. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to write that, but . . . because I did have . . . we had the dinosaur party and I had a lot of parents come up to me and like, why didn't you call and ask for anything? (Transcript 14.2 EV 3/8/95)

David Aspy (personal communication) suggests that when we listen to another person we should lean towards her, cup our hands firmly within our laps, and show the other that we are ready to receive what they have to offer. He had us, in counselor training, hold eggs while we listened to each other. That's how our group worked. We held each others' thoughts the way one holds an egg, not too tight but not too loose. Within that context, we could make discoveries, ask questions, show what we were doing within our classrooms, deal further with curriculum, discuss classroom organization, and face the emotional issues that confronted us.

Asking Questions

We made discoveries, understood what we had done with our children, and planned ahead immersed in our questions and the questions of those in our group.

Questions about children's transitions:

> Kim L: Do you think kids have trouble if they're in a Montessori classroom after a certain grade making the transition to more traditional type of classroom where they maybe learning isn't as child centered. (Transcript 12.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

Questions about curriculum:

> Kim Z: What are they doing? What are you guys studying now? (Transcript 12.4 SD @ Ev 4/5/95)

Questions about children's role in the curriculum:

> Mona: I got a question while she goes for that. . . . can I ask you my question before I forget it?. . . Where she was saying that children, when you're doing a project approach, that they tend to pick areas in which they will excel and do well, you know, and that's how the group leads and takes off like that, do you think . . . you haven't been doing projects quite all year, but do you think if you started at the beginning of the year, and you continually saw people always in certain roles in their project group, and not . . . you know what I mean, if they were always picking the area, like some one's really, really good at art, so they always picked that way to . . . is that okay, is that not okay, do you need to encourage, you know, what do you do? Do you see what I mean? (Transcript 12.4 SD @ Ev 4/5/95)

> Mona: And what if it's always . . . somebody . . .who's always just going off on this tons of writing and everything. I mean, that's great and wonderful and you never want to stop that, but what if it never allows anybody else in the group to take on that role, you know, what if they always see T--- as the writer, whatever group she happens to be in? (Transcription 12.4 SD @ Ev 4/5/95)

> Rick: Have you resolved that? (Transcription from 12.4 SD @ Ev 4/5/95)

Questions about how time is spent:

Linda: I read this and I kept wondering how much of the day did you spend doing the writing and the projects? (Transcription from 12.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

Questions about accountability:

Linda: That's one thing I wanted to know too was how were you able to. . . I know just by teacher observation but did you do any formal types of things? (Transcription 12.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

Questions that demonstrate teachers assuming leadership in the group:

Kim Z: Why don't read what you wrote? (Transcript 12.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

Kim Z: Do you have something? (Transcription 12.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

Linda: So everybody read and write [for next class], right? If we have anything [writing or data] we want to share. (Transcription 12.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

Questions that seek support and encouragement, especially about writing:

Kim R: Seriously, do you want me to read this cause it's . . . not very good and it's really rough. I told you it was kind of embarrassing.? (Transcription r 12.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

Questions that challenge each others' writing:

Kim Z: Where does that go, though? (Transcription 12.7 SD@Ev 4/26/95)

Kim Z: The part where you were saying about how it's connected to real life, I don't know, like, and that's really good. I'm wondering is there a part in there, or is there someplace in your paper where you're going to say how they end up choosing things that are the curriculum? (Transcription 12.8 SD@EV5/17/95)

Questions became an important part of our group because they signified safety, tolerance, and curiosity. As our feelings of safety increased, the teachers began to 'bring their classrooms' to our meetings. By 'bring their classrooms', we came to mean that teachers would bring stories,

artifacts, and samples of life within their classrooms so that we could sense what was unfolding in there. They discussed, asked more questions, searched for ideas, suggested activities, and more as described in the next section.

Teachers Discovering

As discussed above, the teachers in our group found each other, created curriculum, and shared classroom activities. It is not easy to find each other at Elmwood. Kim R believes that teaming undermines a sense of the school as whole. Elmwood teachers eat lunch in their individual teams' planning centers and the teachers rarely gather as a staff in the lounge except for formal faculty meetings or staff development sessions scheduled there by the district or principal. Our class gave the teachers time to talk across grade levels. They discovered each other.

We also discussed curriculum: Nancy's restaurant, Kim L and Kim R's children involved in projects, Kim Z's study of the zoo, Linda and Liz learning about the city, and me discussing issues across the school. Our time together had an element of "show and tell" to it; it was important news that we were sharing as our discoveries each week between our class sessions seemed to demand an audience for analysis and understanding. Teachers brought artifacts of the children's learning, such as writing samples and books they'd read. They showed us photos of the children in action and shared anecdotes from their notes. It was a place to pause, reflect, and plan aloud safely. As we discussed what we had done, we began planning for what might be next, opening ourselves up to the possiblities that the children would present.

And we shared our writing, which will be discussed below. I will mention here that we learned that writing shaped our thinking (Langer & Applebee, 1987) as it became a vehicle for reflection and yet another artifact of our growth that we brought to our group. Here is a sample from Kim R's writing of children as inquirers:

> Kim R: We have found that abstract topics limit children's opportunities for direct observation, an important component of successful projects. This can be reinforced by an example of a project in our classroom on caves. Although the children exhibited an initial excitement over the topic, enthusiasm began to fade quickly due to the children's inability to directly examine their subject. The group members were never able to directly experience the sounds, smells, or sights of a real cave. Everything they learned came directly from second hand resources, including books, pamphlets, letters, and interviews over the telephone. Although students learned a lot, we felt that excitement they felt with prior projects was missing. (Transcript 14.8 SD@EV5/17/95)

Joys From Our Classrooms

The teachers in our group reported that they rarely had the opportunity to discuss what they were doing in their classrooms with other teachers in the school. They didn't want to seem like they were "bragging" but they wanted to honor, make sense of, and share what was occurring as they tried ideas that were new to them and their students; our meetings became a forum for the celebrations. I referred to these times as "joys." We heard about plays the children wrote and performed in Nancy's classroom, the activities completed by the first graders on the hundredth day of school, child-led conferences, and successes experienced by the children. These joys were essentially quick reports on new strategies used in the classroom.

Our group tended to focus increasingly on sustained activities (stories of children, learning, language, teaching, life in the classroom, or curriculum that continued over time) and we looked forward to hearing weekly progress reports on these. When Nancy began to discuss the possibility of her class turning into an authentic Mexican restaurant, we received weekly reports about their progress. These reports included: the search for cookbooks; the assignment of roles such as cook, server, and manager; the various writing activities that the children deemed necessary including invitations, menus, ordering pads, job applications, and thank you letters; the gathering of the cooking materials; and even the students' receipt of real tips from patrons (they were using their own currency for guests at the restaurant).

Nancy relied upon our group to think aloud as a way of analyzing and celebrating her children's accomplishments:

> NANCY: Yea. The other committee's a cookbook and the menu. And the cookbook we've been kind of . . . they went around and gathered cookbooks from like the different teachers in the school who have authentic Mexican cookbooks, plus they went to the library which there's not very many, but we did get at least one really good one, and then they discussed what they want in the cookbook, and they're still trying to decide how they want to do this in this cookbook, but the whole overall goal would be so that every student in the classroom will have a cookbook to bring home from this whole thing. And then also, too, they were in charge of the menu and of course they come up to me and they go, "We can't just choose the food for the menu. We should ask everybody." And I go, "That's a great idea." So then we all got together in a group and they talked about the different kinds of foods that they found in the cookbooks, and then of course I said, well, we also have to be realistic, because if we do this in the classroom, we don't have a stove and all that stuff, so we have to be realistic, too. So then they came up with different foods and okayed it with everybody else, and that was kind of neat, because here they are standing up here, you know, and I'm just sitting back going wow, and so this is the menu that they came up with, and this is kind of like the seventh rough draft, but they

> first wrote it all out, and then they . . . (Transcription from 13.2 SD@EV3/8/95)

Later I will discuss how thinking aloud might have focused, clarified, and helped teachers in our group discover their own voice.

We heard weekly progress on Linda's and Liz's students as they developed projects around the theme of our city. Kim L and Kim R reported on specific projects that different groups were undertaking in their rooms. One week, Kim R brought the photo and narrative montage that she made with her students. Kim described the project and read parts of it to us:

> Kim R: This is my favorite page [of the photo/narrative montage of the rats group]. It says "Enthusiasm was high among the group, the ate, drank and slept rats. Teresa wrote books about rats, Kimmie spent every spare moment with Snowball and Brandon brought a staple remove to school to show as a model of a rat's incisors. He said "This is what a rat's incisors look like." I go 'You're right, wow, what a good way to show,' I mean it was weird. And Cass wrote "I love rats but my rat died on December 4th. I was sad, yep, yep, I was sad all right. When the rat died, I was at my friend Pam's house and I was so sad. I felt so bad and sad. When I got back, we had a funeral. It was sad. Help me, I'm sad. Aaugh!" (Transcription from 13.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

Kim Z reported on the Arctic unit that her children were constantly expanding. They had decided to build an igloo-type structure in the media center and place replicas of Arctic animals within it. Kim also reported on her record keeping of the project, her evaluation of the students, the students' self-evaluations, and the parent evaluations with which she concluded her project.

There were also stories of children. "How is Jimmy?" "Did Theresa do any more on that book?" "Where is K---? Has he moved?" The students who kept us up an night or woke us early in the morning now had another audience. We heard installments of these children, some times weekly,

and offered ideas, suggestions, and strategies. Or, we just listened because we knew it was a difficult situation that would, hopefully, reach some resolution, as our colleague invented (with the student) a way for that student to meet success in the classroom.

We did not merely listen and applaud each others' efforts; as discussed earlier, we asked questions that pushed ourselves and our colleagues and we thought aloud about the implications of one teacher's work on others in the group. For example, Mona was searching for ways to truly realize the Montessori philosophy that believes in placing children in the world with a sense of power, knowledge, and self worth. One week, she reported to us:

> Mona: It finally came together. Four of the children visited the neighborhood grocery store and they made a list of healthy snacks that they would like to have in the classroom, and then they went to get prices, and then they came back and they had to decide for the week, with $6 for the week, how we would feed our class, and what snacks we would have, and it was really interesting how they decided to do that, and they don't understand the process yet, you know, but they're learning it. You know, and they're learning, well, gee, there's 24 students, how am I going to figure how many crackers I need within this box, and how many times will this box of crackers feed us, you know, they think that's a lot of fun. And then we get the snacks and they either prepare them or help serve them. And today we had carrots. (Transcription from 3/8/95 13.2)

Mona was not the only member of our group looking for connections that her students were making; Kim R (and others) found the affective connections:

> Kim R: That's Eva. She's the one that sits through group and says "You know we wrote a book and we had people's names in the class and we used those peoples names because we knew how to spell them," but she goes "We hurt peoples feeling because they thought we were writing about them and the other people didn't think we writing, so we're not going to use people's names in books. We're going to make people's names up so we don't hurt anybody's feelings anymore." (Transcription from 13.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

And there were aesthetic connections, too:

> Kim L: [During calendar time they use the < and > signs to discuss numbers.] Zach, who was a member of the machine group, said, "Hey, that looks like an inclined plane."
>
> Rick: Talking about the great events. You talk about a. . . that's a sophisticated connection.
>
> Kim Z: Yeah.
>
> Kim R: Boy today when we put the music on, Eric said "That must be Venus. I said "Why? Why do you say that?" He said "It just sounds like Venus." He goes "That's Venus right there." and this music sounds like Venus.
>
> Rick: And that's a classical piece?
>
> Kim L: Uh huh, The Planets.
>
> Rick: The Planets is a classical piece somebody wrote and he recognizes Venus!
>
> Kim L: Yes. (Transcription from 13.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

As time passed, teachers became increasingly comfortable at "taking the air" for extended periods of time. Originally, they might talk for (literally) five seconds and chide themselves for talking for so long a time; eventually, we came to focus on individuals, help them cultivate and elaborate their thinking, and encourage them to sustain their thinking aloud because we knew it benefited the individual and the group. This was empowering for the teachers. They were achieving a sense of voice and willingness to share the knowledge they were creating. The next step seemed to be the cultivation of voices as personal, professional, and political vehicles for growth and change. We would do that work through our writing.

A Writers Support Group

As our year of researching and thinking together progressed, we all began feeling the effects of being intensely involved in teaching, thinking, researching, and analyzing. We were a devoted group and had worked hard; classrooms, teachers, relationships, and curriculum had all changed in some way for every member of the group. What would re-energize us and, at the same time, help folks pull their learning together by taking their systematic collections of thinking and support some type of formal organization and, perhaps, closure as we looked toward the end of the school year? We renewed our work with vigor as we studied ourselves as writers, looked at what others wrote and *how* they wrote, and ventured into sharing our own writing efforts within our group. We evolved from a researcher/inquiry support group to a researcher/inquiry/writer support group. Our added function, writing, made our time together much more complex as we dealt with issues within our lives, within our classrooms, within the school and district, within the group, and the writing that seemed to add another dimension to those layers.

Jane, as the district early childhood consultant, wanted material to present to the board; she also wanted some type of "results" to show the rest of the teachers in the district. We discussed the idea of portfolios as systematic collections (Sunstein & Graves, 1993) but decided to write a book because ours was a story that needed to be told and heard. The thought of being published re-energized the group.

Safety for Writers

Once one member shared her writing and took an extended period of time to get responses to it, others in the group also took risks and began to share.

A safe setting allowed us to deal with the difficult issues in writing. "How do I organize all of this," Kim R asked one afternoon. She was feeling overwhelmed with all the data she had accumulated and was trying to transform and reduce to a written piece. We faced how hard it is to be a writer:

> Kim Z: Really hard. It's so hard that I say, forget it for the night, I'll do it tomorrow.
>
> Mona: It is. Scary. (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95)
>
> Kim Z: I mean I worked from 6 - 10:00 last night, reading, going back and reading things, trying to figure out looking back at pictures and I didn't spend a lot of time writing I don't feel like since I only have 3 pages but I kept changing things, I thought no that doesn't go there and I don't know, it's hard. And I didn't expect it to be so. . .you know, I didn't expect, you know, I don't know. (Transcript 16.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

And we persevered through the difficulty of becoming a writer because of the need to express what we were doing and because we supported each other in taking risks as writers, sharing that writing, and listening to feedback from ourselves and our colleagues.

> Kim Z: No, because I thought about that because I thought about putting this stuff in about working with Kevin [her student teacher]—having the support of another colleague right in my room. . . Because really, I seriously don't know if I would have done it by myself, you know, without him right there saying, you know. . . .
>
> Linda: Go for it. (Transcript 16.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

And there was plenty of encouragement:

> Kim L: Seriously, do you want me to read this cause it's not too good?
>
> Kim L: Yes, yes, yes, read it.
>
> Kim R: It's not very good.
>
> Kim Z: Yes, it is.

Kim R: It's not very good and it's really rough. I told you it was kind of embarrassing.

Liz: Oh we know it will be terrible but share it with us anyway. [joking voice]

Kim Z: It's good. She's such a perfectionist.

Kim R: Yeah, talk about it. . .

Kim Z: Read it, read it. I'll make ya. [Kim R reads her piece] (Transcript 16.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

Kim L wanted to be encouraged, but didn't want to hear encouragement that was not rooted in her piece, as is shown in her response to someone saying she should read her piece because it was good:

Kim : Mine's real rough.

Rick: I love these terms.

Kim L: It is, I mean, it's just a quick thing.

??: It's good, read.

Kim L: You haven't even looked at it. (Transcript 16.6a SD @ Ev 4/19/95)

And slowly, over time, each teacher in her own way begins sharing her writing, taking risks, asking for what she needs from the group, and realizing that we have created a safe forum for this work.

Kim R: I'm not scared anymore. I used to feel scared about bringing my writing to you guys, but I don't feel scared any more. . . It doesn't hurt my feelings or anything. At first you kind of think, oh God, they hate it, but it's not that way. (Transcript 16.7 SD@Ev 4/26/95)

One nagging question was whether or not we wanted anyone beyond the group to read our writing. The original passion about touching other teachers with our words became too real as folks began completing pieces:

> Kim R: I don't know them and I don't know if I feel comfortable share . . . I mean, I better get used to it, I guess.
>
> Jane: A lot of people are going to be reading you.
>
> Kim R: Yeah, but we don't know them, we don't have to look at them. (Transcript 16.8 SD@EV 5/17/95)

We overcame that; here we are, our voices in print. But it was not easy. Even as we readied things to make copies just within our group, Nancy expressed hesitancy about sharing her piece. She never did share with our group during the year she was a group member. At one meeting, trying to encourage her, I said:

> Rick: You can tell people how hard this was. You can write: "I want you to know how hard this was, I did this, and then I did this, and then we did this in the group and then I did this on my own, and then I had this anxiety attack for three weeks". . . and retell that story to share your journey. That way is probably one of the most honest things we can do, because [as a reader, a teacher would] read through and it's like everything's so wonderful in her class and how'd she write such a great book. It's like, well, where's the anxiety here? I don't see any problem with putting that in. . .(Transcript 16.8 SD@EV5/17/95)

Our pep talks to one another didn't always work, as in the case of Nancy. However, she readily admits the importance of the group for her; each of us wondered if, had she stayed at Elmwood, she would have committed her voice to paper. In January, 1996, we invited Nancy to one of our ongoing authors' meetings and she seemed excited about contributing a photo montage of her work to our tentative book.

Publishing

As we wrote, the idea of being public thrilled and threatened. Liz wondered if her piece would be rejected while all the others got in. "It's all or none," I told her. We were in this together. The proposal for our

books was a burst of energy. We were busy writing abstracts, table of contents, and planning what it might look like.

Our first proposal was rejected and it hurt. It sent us spiraling, but we worked to convince each other that it was worth it to keep writing. We were getting a lot out of the writing: it taught us about ourselves, it was affecting our relationship with each other and our understanding of children, and it was shaping curriculum decisions and enactment.

We met after the summer, following our first year together as a study group, and an interesting phenomenon had developed, one that I should have anticipated having taught in public schools for over sixteen years. The teachers had lost energy on their projects. They were focusing on a the next school year and didn't want to relive the previous year by trying to write a chapter. We met and discussed. Later, I wrote in my journal:

> We realized that it worked better as a course, when we had a structure imposed from the outside. We needed a course to structure our writing--the course made the relationship and commitment more contractual in nature. This is still power over. It is my power, as an agent of the university, or the power of the district, holding a required time needed to meet as a 'thing' over folks' heads. They suggest that we need this; Kim Z says it makes it all worth while. This may be quite accurate. Some teachers need a payoff (even if it's a course that they pay for). I don't find this unreasonable at all.
>
> This kind of writing may need to be a lot quicker than I ever thought. It needs to be done during the school year or immediately in the summer afterwards, otherwise it will fall to me to be the major voice. Perhaps this means that books are not what is needed. Perhaps teachers would rather write for state or local NCTE or IRA journals; it sure psyched up our group when I published their work in the Nebraska language Arts Bulletin (Meyer, 1996b). [The Bulletin is a state-level journey that I edit; I included shortened versions of some of the teachers' pieces in one issue.] (Journal Entry 5/17/95)

By the beginning of January, 1996, we were back on the writing path. Individuals were making important decisions about their written work.

Liz and Linda were questioning the way their piece sounded "so dry and boring; it's just a time line," Linda said. They were excited to move on in their writing, and curious about what it might look like. Kim R was almost finished with her piece from next year and felt motivated to revisit it with the hope of finishing it. Kim L found last year to be a good "warm up" and wanted to systematically study one facet of her classroom this year and contribute that to the book. Mona was uncommitted at the time of this writing. Even though the teachers in our group are in very different places in their writing, one thing became quite clear: it is not easy for teachers to write. Their writing is "against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

Writing Against the Grain

Teachers are not supposed to write. Their writing upsets the day-to-day lives of themselves and others in the school. Their writing changed the tone and tenor of lunches together, of after school talk, and of relationships with other (non-writing) teachers. Our writing began to bind us; we were energized and, at the same time, excluding others in the school who chose not to write. They were excluded because we had writing to discuss and they did not. It caused tension that remained well into the next school year when we were meeting about our writing.

Writing changed our lives (Langer & Applebee, 1987). Teachers asked, "What's really new about what I'm doing?" They began to see their work as a contribution to the children with whom they worked and their colleagues. In the *Implications* section, below, I will discuss this further.

The Group Setting

Our group met in some one's classroom once each week. The sponsor teacher (the one in whose classroom we were meeting) also provided a snack, usually popcorn, some candy, and sometimes some fruit. Our sharing of food was one way in which we demonstrated caring for one another. As discussed above, we also listened to each other, encouraged each other, and shared ideas about classroom strategies, curriculum, philosophy, activity, culture, inclusion, and management. Our reliance on each other is demonstrated by Kim Z's thought, one sleepless night:

> Kim Z: And you know what? I laid awake thinking the other night at 3:00 in the morning. I should have just called you. [to Kim R] (Transcript 17.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

As Mona was leaving class one evening, Kim Z turned to her:

> Kim Z: You're just so insightful and reflective.
>
> Mona: Oh that's nice of you to say. I feel comfortable in sharing with this group, you know, that's really nice and I love what I'm learning this year. I'm learning a lot and that's not always the case. Because I have help and I have people say this is good, try this. That's really neat for me. This is a wonderful experience. See you guys. (Transcript 17.6b SD @EV 4/19/95)

We had, by April, reached a point of honesty and sincerity that allowed us to question, name, and respond to each other and issues of life and teaching at Elmwood with honesty, caring, and the intensity of emotion that often accompanies "interwoven conversations" (Newman, 1991).

Still, with each successive class, we worked to check up on each others' feelings as it became evident that we were taking more and more risks. Linda had just finished reading a first draft of the first piece that she shared with us.

> Rick: I'm curious about how you felt reading it because you seemed kind of nervous.

> Linda: Oh I was a wreck. It was really hard for me to share it because it's just so much a part of me. It's a part of my heart and if you wouldn't have liked it, I would have really been hurt. You know, it's really a part of me and I don't know, I just. . . (Transcript 18.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

Mona explained the way we began to resonate with each other in terms of her understanding of Montessori:

> Mona: And I really believe when you go into Montessori, each person like we do in this class, you take the class and you get out of it what you're going to get out of it and that's what you end up doing is sharing of yourself with others. And so that's what we're all doing . . . we're taught to observe and that's why I love being with you [the members of our class] because I can develop those skills more because you're going through the same pains that I go through and observe and try to take notes—I hate to take notes about kids. I try to do it, I do other things and trying other things and it's good to have that and I've never had that before that. (Transcript 18.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

We helped each other face the difficulties of teaching and changing, even supporting each other when we decided not to face an issue:

> Kim Z: And how do I feel about it. I mean I still have very mixed feelings about the feelings I get from my team right now, you know? I don't know if I'm ready to evaluate that. You know what I mean?
>
> Rick: Yeah, well it just might not be time for that.
>
> Linda: It would be hard to write it if you're not sure yourself. (Transcript 18.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

Dissonance/Teams Disrupted

One of the most difficult things to face as teachers in our group began to change was the effect that change had on their teams. Teams at Elmwood were usually stable planning entities; that would distribute labor as different individuals offer to teach or organize specific facets of the curriculum; other times they would generate curricular activities that

they would each carry out in their own classrooms. Historically, Kim Z's second grade team planned together. For example, while planning for February, they sat around a table in the teachers lounge and formed piles, as each teacher donated their ideas for certain topics. They had plastic tubs with manila folders, booklets, and worksheets in them; a topic was suggested and each teacher looked through her tub to find activities for that. The topics included Martin Luther King, Jr., Black History Month, Dental Health Month, presidents, Valentines' Day, and more.

But, Kim Z was abandoning the team's planning strategies. She offered ideas to them, but also noted that her class would not be doing what the other second grade classes would be doing. Her group had not completed the unit on the Arctic and she would not ignore the students' enthusiasm. Kim Z reported to our study group:

> Kim Z: You know? I mean it was like, 'Oh Boy, well I've done it now.' Let them [other team members] decide what to do so, you know, it was awful . . . We [Kim Z and her student teacher] felt really restricted and we felt like we had this whole tub of stuff that we had to get through and that the team was, you know, we were behind anyways because we hadn't been doing what the team was doing, you know and so it was awful. We hated it, so, but now, they [Kim Z's second graders] are doing really interesting things now with this new stuff. It's completely different, it's not, you know, it's not anything like before. (Transcript 18.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

Later, Kim told us that she did, indeed, have all the materials that the group had piled up together and had duplicated for the children in all four second grade classrooms:

> Kim Z: . . .and I sat there and went along with that whole thing and that stack is still run off and we did nothing. (Transcript 18.9 SD@EV5/14/95)

Kim Z was very worried about this move away from her team's regular way of functioning. She was concerned on many levels, including the personal because her team often met socially. By the end of the school year, Kim

had decided to move to the first grade team, trading classrooms with a member of the first grade team who was feeling excluded from the way that Kim R and Kim L planned.

Linda felt it, too:

> Linda: Because even our team is different now, because when we first started everybody did the same thing at the same time on the same day. And now it's really changed, because, yeah, we still talk about the whole thing, like, okay right now we're doing the geometry and the architecture, and everybody has kind of gone off in their own little. . . I mean, we're still together, but it's not the same day, the same time, the same thing. (Transcript 18.8 SD@EV5/17/95)

Dissonance for an individual became disruptive for the team's regular way of being within that team. I will return to this idea more in the section on disruption, below.

Philosophical Discussions

Our discussions of the philosophy upon which our practices rested reflected the professional integrity of our group. We were not technicians, as Shannon (1989) describes them. Rather, our group was substantive thinkers who planned instructional strategies and activities that are rooted in ways of thinking about learning. Some times we brought up issues of philosophy for clarification. For example, Kim Z wanted to know the difference between whole language, language experience, literature based, and constructivism. The conversation that followed from her question forced us to look at the theory and language of our profession and how it affects our understanding of practice. On another day, we discussed the difference between cognitive and metacognitive processes and whether or not planning units with children is metacognitive activity.

The teachers were aware of their thinking as being atypical, as reflected in a conversation during one class. Kim Z had been visited by teachers from another school who heard about her children doing inquiry:

> Kim Z: . . . that's the thing that always just gets me about how people just want to change and then they just jump into this and they. . .
>
> Liz: They don't have the philosophy, they. . .
>
> Kim Z: haven't read anything, they haven't studied anything. They don't have the philosophy and the background knowledge, I guess, and they don't understand why they're doing it. And I think you understand why you've made this change and it's because of this course or whatever, because of what you've read and people need to know that. . . you see how you've changed because you've read.
>
> Liz: People will not change unless they want to. That's why this just stuck out at me, you know? We have to provide the opportunity for that change to come from within rather than trying to impose it from without.
>
> Kim R: But you can look at those classrooms that do it because they think it's the way to do it. . .
>
> Kim Z: Or because somebody else is doing it, so they're just kind of copying.
>
> Liz: Right, they copy what they're doing. . .
>
> Kim R: . . .but they don't have any reason for why they're doing it.
>
> Kim Z: No philosophies.
>
> Kim R: They don't understand what's happening and what they're looking for.
> (Transcript 19.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

Mona provided constant demonstrations of the relationship between theory and practice, rooted in her Montessori background. One afternoon,

as we met in her room, she explained some of the materials that Maria Montessori invented:

> Mona: Do you see that big black triangle behind you? . . . When Maria Montessori first began developing material for children, she created this to represent a symbol to us and she created a triangle to represent with the pyramids because the pyramids lasted a long time. And she made it black like coal because in the earth, coal is part of our earth and also lasts a long time. So when she created this, this is the symbol she created to show us about nouns. We have our cards over there. We name our cards and then we lay them out and then we find other things in our room. And so when they do and so it's like would you bring me a pencil and lay it here. And then they go around the room and find objects. So this is called a noun. And whenever you see nouns, this is the symbol that would have brought the noun. It is a large black triangle. So they're fun lessons. You know the kids go 'OHHH'. So they want to know. So the verb is the red sun because it is moving, constantly moving, and it's large and it has energy so it's a large red round. . . And then they get to hop, run, skip around and they love that. (Transcript 19.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

Mona changed over time. She still felt very committed to the passion and use of metaphor that she learned from Montessori, but Lucy Calkins' work (1994) influenced her view of how children use, learn, and invent language. She encouraged our class to challenge her, she read books that stretched her, and she brought questions to us when she felt dissonance between what she was doing and her emerging beliefs, indeed she used our group as a forum for such thinking:

> Mona: [In] my teacher training we were taught how to use the materials, how to teach. We were taught what to look for at the age of the child—you know, how they exactly develop. But we were also taught to watch to see what they show us and where they're at. And we're taught to observe and that's why I love being with you [our class] because I can develop those skills more because you're going through the same pains that I go through . . . trying other things and it's good to have that and I've never had that before. (Transcript 19.3 SD@EV 3/28/95)

Linda was part of the Follow Through grant in our city; the grant helped institute ideas from Head Start into primary level classrooms. Linda spent part of her writing time retracing her teaching life in order to get in touch with her philosophical roots about teaching and learning. One afternoon she read part of a piece she was working on in which she explains connections she made between her philosophy and her classroom activity.

> Linda: I tried to continue many of the program practices, such as learning centers, but I fell back to what was more comfortable, what was comfortable for me and less work. I still maintain my old theory but I try to do it following the district's curriculum. I never questioned the need of the curriculum manuals or objectives in the reading and math areas to go by the school district. What I never stopped to think about in question was how the child learns best, and my role in the learning process. I started to question my theory over a period of several years as I read the writings of noted educators in psychology, such as Dewey, Harste, Goodman, Piaget, Katz, . Then I was invited to attend the first whole language umbrella conference in St. Louis. I was able to absorb many ideas from the workshops I attended. My theory of education was changed forever. Since that time, I have gradually begun to change the way that I do things with my students. And I was going to write the things that I've done then, too. (Transcript 19.8 SD@EV5/17/95)

And our philosophical discussions reflected our reading--reading which had influenced our thinking and classroom strategies.

> Mona: Well, this is the second time around [her second attempt to write about her classroom], but that's okay. I learned in this book [Graves, 1991], that's okay.
>
> Rick: That's *real* okay.
>
> Kim L: That book turned you around?
>
> Mona: Yes, it did. It really did. And I took notes so that I can share.
>
> Rick: Good, so next time we'll have you share that and do a book talk. Thank you again so much. (Transcript 20.3 SD@EV3/28/95)

Layers of Inquiry/Politics of Inquiry

Our group became increasingly *intrigued with children as inquirers.*

> Kim R: . . . I mean we're trying to show how this [children's inquiry] is starting to take over our entire curriculum now—these project groups are taking over everything. It's taking over every aspect of everything we're doing from math to. . . I mean literature, they're bringing books about these things and to share with each other, so that's our literature time.
>
> Kim L: Well yeah, the poem came out in writer's workshop.
>
> Kim R: It's really exciting and so that next year I really hope. . .(Transcript 21.5 SD @ Ev 4/12/95)

When teachers "back up and write that down," they are studying their students as those students are inquiring. Teacher research involves the "systematic, intentional inquiry" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 2) in which the teachers are engaged as their students are also engaged in their own "systematic, intentional inquiry." The act of writing it down was typically followed by bringing it to class. This led to more about inquiry (Reimer, Stephens, Smith, 1993), language and literacy (cited earlier), teaching and learning (Perrone, 1991), and inclusion (Kappan, 19**). The teachers' questions and processes for dealing with those questions developed into our group's agenda-another layer of inquiry. I was also studying our group as we studied together. The layers of inquiry, all with children very much in mind, affected all of us.

The view of teachers as "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1983; 1986) appears to be an increasingly common referent to teachers who are thoughtful about their students' teaching and learning. In our group, as with others, (see, for e.g.: Patterson, Santa, Short, & Smith, 1993; Goswami, & Stillman, 1987; Hubbard & Power, 1993) it also meant

understanding the self as a learner. We sought to do what Dewey (1938) suggests:

> The plan, in other words, is a cooperative enterprise, not a dictation. The teacher's suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. . . . The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence. (Experience and education, p. 72)

Our group strove to be 'abiding students of education' in the spirit of Dewey (1904):

> The tendency of educational development to proceed by reaction from one thing to another, to adopt for one year, or for a term of seven years, this or that new study or method of teaching, and then as abruptly to swing over to some new education gospel, is a result which would be impossible if teachers were adequately moved by their own independent intelligence. The willingness of teachers, especially of those occupying administrative positions, to become submerged in the routine detail of their callings, to expend the bulk of their energy upon forms and rules and regulations, and reports and percentages, is another evidence of the absence of intellectual vitality. If teachers were possessed by the spirit of an abiding student of education, this spirit would find some way of breaking through the mesh and coil of circumstance and would find expression for itself. (Mr. Z Dewey, 1904, p. 17)

The teachers in our group called themselves whole language teachers; they had abandoned the basal reader and were struggling with what it means to be a whole language teacher, or a constructivist teacher, or a developmentally appropriate teacher (as Kim Z asked, above, "What's the difference between all these; are they all the same?"). Inquiry, then, is not merely the process of asking children what they know and what they want to know followed by the use of perfunctory research strategies in a library. Inquiry is a political act. It is a political act for children who research genuine interests utilizing primary research methods, such as

securing two rats to study how they communicate, reproduce, eat, and more as Kim R's students did in one of their inquiry groups.

Inquiry is a vehicle toward attaining the educative experiences that Dewey (1938) discusses. It supports learning over time as it sustains, changes, and supports learning new concepts. This is true for the children in inquiry groups; for the teachers in those classrooms, for the teachers in our own group, and for me studying our group with our group. These are complex and interwoven layers that help us understand who we are (children and/or teachers and/or university researchers) because:

> [e]very thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is thus really educational, while all authentic education investigates thinking. The more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate. Education and thematic investigation, in the problem-posing concept of education, are simply different moments of the same process. (Freire, 1970, p. 101)

Inquiry, then, is not limited to the primary classroom. It is a process of problem-posing for all learners. Short & Harste with Burke (1996) also found this to be true. Although their "authoring cycle" was originally suggested as a way to create the writing curriculum in classrooms, they:

> experimented in our own college classrooms as well as talked and worked with other teachers and colleagues . . . [and]. . . came to see the authoring cycle as a metaphor for learning and a general framework for curriculum. (p. 39)

They had found, as our group did, that using inquiry to learn to write (whether for a primary aged student, teacher, or professor) also involves writing to learn to inquiry. To paraphrase Halliday, (1988), we learn writing, we learn through writing, we learn about writing (and the writers); at the same time, we learn inquiry (processes), we learn through inquiry, and we learn about inquiry (and the inquirers). Indeed, in our

learning, as Kathy Whitmore has suggested (personal communication) we learned community, we learned through community, and we learned about community--in primary classrooms and among and between ourselves in our weekly meetings.

Kathy Short (1993) writes specifically about the importance of adding the layer of teacher educator to the many possible layers for inquiry.

> Teacher educators who do research in their own classrooms offer the profession both a different perspective on the learning environments of preservice and inservice teachers and a way to transform those environments. (p. 155)

I would include staff development activity that is based upon servicing-in as teacher education, researcher education, and, ultimately, child education.

Recall that at the beginning of our work together, I thought that I would focus on the literacy activity within the participating teachers' classrooms. Literacy is my area of interest and I knew there would be much to find at Elmwood for many reasons, one of which is its diverse student population. The further we walked down the path of inquiry, the more I found myself being confronted with the political and economic realities of what it means to be a teacher, a parent, and a learner for each member of our group. So did members of the group.

As the group untangled their own literacy pasts (especially Linda and Liz, focusing on their journey as teachers and learners in the first piece they wrote to share with our group), we underwent a process of *conscientization* , which Freire (1970) defines as part of the process of:

> continual problematization of the learners' existential situations as represented in the codified images. The longer the problematization proceeds, and the more the subjects enter into the "essence" of the problematized object, the more they are able to unveil this "essence." The more they unveil it, the more their awakening

> consciousness deepens, thus leading to the "conscientization" of the situation by the poor classes. (p. 221)

Are teachers "the poor classes" whose awareness is roused by inquiry? Inquiry may be a response to "the predictable failure educational reform" (Sarason, 1990) at Elmwood because of the district support for site based inquiry and creation of curriculum.

Although Stuckey (1991) is discussing literacy, the same may be said about teacher inquiry:

> Literacy [I would substitute 'inquiry] is a social restriction and an individual accomplishment. Individuals read and writer, or don't, and individuals do with their literacy what they can. The subjectivities of minds, and the ways in which people make their lives and thoughts, and the ways in which people are coerced, entrapped, colonized, or freed, must be addressed as processes. At the same time, the processes must not become the issue, since the conditions for any process, and especially for the literacy process, determine the possible outcomes. That is why, for example, teaching literacy depends on the circumstances rather than on the textbook. Our attention needs to be focused on the ***conditions*** in every instance. A theory of literacy is, thus a theory of society, of social relationships; and the validity of a theory of literacy derives from the actual lives of the people who make the society [the school]. (p. 64, emphasis added)

Stuckey continues her discussion by addressing how literacy programs can support change:

> To do this, we must remember who we really are. We are not just private individuals in whose private minds the printed word works powerful deeds. We are, to be sure, natural individuals, but we are social before we are born, and the commerce we do with our literacy is always, fundamentally, social. We are arranged by our relations to literacy, to how and why literacy is produced, and to the efforts of what literacy is about. The extension of these relations describes how close to the edge of survival we live. (p. 95)

The teachers in our group at Elmwood founded a thinking and writing collective that supported them in the social work of inquiry across the many layers of self, group, classroom, and colleague discussed above.

They were inventing the "commerce" that they would do with their inquiry and their children were also inventing a classroom commerce to engage in and use inquiry. Inquiry became a sort of capital that afforded children prestige among their classmates (and teachers who valued it as well). Inquiry was also a form of capital in our group as we supported, cajoled, questioned, and ultimately presented our inquiring selves to one another. As will be discussed below, this was not received quietly at the school as many regularities were upset.

Inquiry led us to speak, write, read, listen, think, search, and push ourselves to understand the context in which the members of the group taught, learned, and worked daily. It led to understanding what it means to speak, to write, and to put the 'self' forward--it led to an understanding of voice.

Voice

Goswami and Stillman's (1987)almost classic book on teachers as researchers explores teachers as agents of change using research as a vehicle for that change. Summarizing Goswami and Stillman, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) note that changes include "teaching, . . . perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers; . . . becom[ing] rich resources; . . . critical, responsive read[ing] and use of current research; . . . study. . . without large sums of money; [and] collaborat[ing] with their students to answer questions important to both" (p. 8). This is a process of teachers coming into their own, finding their voice, their own and articulate voice. Among other things, finding voice is a moral act, as discussed by Gilligan (1993):

> In separating the voice of the self from the voices of others, the woman asks if it is possible to be responsible to herself as well as to others and thus to reconcile the disparity between hurt and care.

> The exercise of such responsibility requires a new kind of judgment, whose first demand is for honesty. To be responsible for oneself, it is first necessary to acknowledge what one is doing. The criterion for judgment thus shifts from goodness to truth when the morality of action is assessed not on the basis of its appearance in the eyes of others, but in terms of the realties of its intention and consequence. (p. 82-83)

We were working to separate our voices from the expected (by the administration) voice within the district. Yes, the district office was asking for change in some areas, like early childhood. And, the teachers continually received conflicted messages that seemed to ask them not to question or think or speak. Teachers are expected to 'voice' the district prescribed curriculum, and to basically not question decisions made at the district office. Teachers were expected to be silent or to act as though the wisdom dispensed at the district office was to be dispensed to the children in a banking manner (Freire, 1970a). The teacher is expected to be a quiet and well-functioning conduit of the curriculum. The movement towards inquiry meant that the curriculum could be locally created by those willing to undertake the endeavor. It meant that decisions about many things, on many levels, would be made by the teacher reflective of classroom activity and decisions made with students.

Many teachers might react negatively to what I've just explained. They would suggest that they close the door and do what they please. Yet, at Elmwood, this was not the case. Most teams planned together and the planning was a collective move toward mediocrity as teachers agreed upon common content that would be covered (recall Kim Z's description of her students' study of the Arctic). The ethos of the school (Lortie, 1975) was one that supported team work, but the activity of the team typically

involved a curriculum that did not reflect individual teachers' voices or the interests and imaginations of children.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986) discussion of "self, voice, and mind" applies to our expression of our selves in writing and our lived classroom and school experiences. Although the voices of teachers are rarely silent because they are not among the "most socially, economically, and educationally deprived" (Belenky, et al. pp. 23-24), they are often silent because of their interpretation of the power structure of schools, one that treats teachers as though they are deprived and deprives them of decision-making, input, and assigns low prestige to teacher competence. Fine (1987) suggests that many students are silenced in schools. On another level, so are many teachers. Nancy, as a first year classroom teacher, demonstrated such silence. Sirotnik (1983) also discusses school as a place where students must be quiet. Again, it is quite likely that some teachers' voices are silenced by their understanding of the structure of schools and function of teachers within that structure. Dewey (1938) sensed this (quite long ago):

> To impositions from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning from experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. (pp. 19-20)

I do wish to paint a picture of some teachers as feeling oppressed (Freire, 1970a); their oppression parallels that of many poor or diverse groups (see Shannon, 1990, for discussions about students being silenced). Although Freire's (1970a) discussion of trust states that "trust is

obviously absent in the anti-dialogics of the banking method of education...[leading to] [h]opelessness [as] a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (p. 80), the work of our group suggests that within the hierarchical nature of the school system, teachers can feel the absence of trust and the hopelessness that results in silence or procedural activity rather than pedagogy and praxis that rests in substantive thinking.

> For the members of our group, coming to know our own voices:
> Authentic liberation--the process of humanization--is not another deposit to be made in the [people]. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of [people] on their world. (Freire, 1970a, p. 66)

Our weekly meetings served as a forum for the communication that Freire sees as foundational to our understanding of our positions and world views, to make sense of the ethos of the workplace world, and to coalesce initiatives for acting upon that world.

Teachers aspirations may not seem to be as leveled as the students described by MacLeod (1995), but they are quite leveled nonetheless. Teachers are not expected to express viewpoints that depart from curricular directions. Indeed, in terms of curricular decisions, schools are often places in which teachers are expected to be quiet and carry out the district mandated curriculum.

In that carrying out of mandated curriculum, teachers consider themselves "learners," in the sense of "received knowledge, because they could "hear, understand, and remember" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 36) and institute the curriculum. The district office, for some, is seen as the authority, and some of the Elmwood teachers (all of whom are women in our group) may have been among:

> those who think they *receive* all knowledge [and] are more apt to think of authorities, not friends, as sources of truth. . .[and] feel that

> [they] could not generate facts and ideas through reflection on [their] own experience. (p. 39)

Members of our group were smart about procedural knowledge. They knew what must be done to be successful at Elmwood. Mr. Z, as a new and supportive principal, listened to his teachers. Very slowly for some, and more quickly for others, they began to trust him. And, trust in our group was built quickly, perhaps because of the perceived urgent need on the part of the teachers to talk with each other. The role of silent or received knower was not one they could accept once they genuinely accepted the permission offered to create curriculum as an R & D site. They sensed their oppression and reacted to the seriousness of the claim by the early childhood consultant (Jane) that they could re-invent early childhood education this year as long as it was consistent with an idea: developmentally appropriate practice. Now they were given permission to think and plan. Some teachers at Elmwood, in the year-end interviews I conducted, did not trust or want this freedom. Some feared it would only be retracted later. Others felt that it was not their job to think:

> [Mr. Z] is my boss. I'm paid to do what he says and if I don't do that I should be fired. My job is to carry out the district curriculum. I don't make those types of [curricular] decisions. (Interview Teacher XX, May, 1995).

Historically, teachers have been quiet. As women, they were treated as second class citizens 'trained' to be technicians rather than substantive thinkers (Shannon, 1989). Shannon suggests that:

> To understand their work, their experience, and their school culture, teachers must look again at the everyday events of their lessons. Not though the rationalized subjectivity that suggests that basal reading materials, tests, and bureaucratic structure are necessary to keep pace with modern demands on literacy, but through discussion of these objects to determine what they mean for teachers' and students' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Since teachers can only create new knowledge based on their current

> understanding, they must be subjects in the educative process and the discussions must be based on teachers' lived experience. (p. 136)

This means that teachers become inquirers and that their inquiry becomes a vehicle for their voice. It is through inquiry that teachers can "make connections between their experience and current social structure" (Shannon, 1989, p. 137) in the school; get a sense that school "doesn't have to be this way (p. 139); and "act on their new knowledge (p. 141).

Many of the teachers were silenced because of previous writing experiences that were harsh and negative, others were writing in subjective or procedural ways. We supported each other in developing each others' constructed voices, voices that included a sense of the extant literature, our thinking, and the expression of voices in the classroom and school.

> Rick: . . . And so it's time for teachers to have their voice. That's why two things become important. One is we have to decide about writing it, and the other is to show that we read things and that we're not just based in our classroom and we've never read anything beyond it. I think we lend credibility to ourselves when we quote somebody else, or you say you went to the first umbrella conference and went to a session at which so-and-so talked, and was. . (Transcript 16.7 SD@Ev 4/26/95

Voice is, in part, an agent of morality; as all our members came to began the search for each individual voice, our group began to sense:

> the centrality of the concepts of responsibility and care in women's constructions of the moral domain, the close tie in women's thinking between conceptions of the self and of morality, and ultimately the need for an expanded developmental theory that includes, rather than rules out from consideration, the differences in the feminine voice. (Gilligan, 1993, p. 105)

We were finding a difference in voice, some of which had to do with teachers' oppression, some of which had to do with all the teachers (except me) being women. An "expanded theory" of teacher development needs to include teacher responsibility and care in the construction of a *teaching domain* that cultivates the teaching voice that is rooted in inquiry.

Members of our group believed that they had no place in writing and that they should (if they wrote at all) write in a way that would please a traditional high school English teacher (formal, with strict adherence to standards of paragraphing, grammar, and more) or college professor. It helped to read Avery (1993) and Rief (1991) because they are women teacher researchers who write about how hard teaching is, how to craft a classroom, and demonstrate (through their writing) that teachers are writers and perceptive researchers in their own classrooms. The group supported each other in the move to find our voice as writers:

> Kim R: You're getting . . . you've gotten much better at journaling.
>
> Kim Z: Yea, that's my problem. I can't get . . . I've got . . . because I'm looking at her (Meaning Kim R), it's like I've got . . . that's what I have to do, I have to write this down, I need to just do it, obviously. (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95)

Kim Z knew it was time to write. And when she wanted to know what to do about using the word "one" instead of "I" as a teacher researcher:

> Kim L: I'd much rather read something that says "I," because you know it's coming from them instead of somebody. . . (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95)

"One" is the objectified self, distanced from self and work and implies a disownership of thinking. The answer came from the group as we decided

how to deal with such questions. Our dealings with writing were, then, emotional, pragmatic, and practical.

We dealt with audience quite a bit. Who would read our work:

> Mona: I've been, you know, I've been thinking I can't write this, and I'm going, gee, maybe I can because of what I said today, but then who's the audience? . . .
>
> Kim R: I don't know. I guess my . . . I don't know who I'm using it for. . . what I envision it for is for you guys, for Mr. Z [the principal], for anybody that comes to Elmwood next year that wants to understand what we're doing in our classroom. (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95) . . .
>
> Kim Z: . . . first think [you're] writing to me, like you're telling me more about it, because I'm always coming down to ask her, and . . . write it for J--- [another teacher] or D--- [another teacher], too, trying to convince them that this is the way to go.
>
> Rick: To make a case, make it a case.
>
> Kim Z: Yea, make it . . . this is my philosophy, this is the way I believe and write from that perspective. (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95)

And taking extended periods of time to focus on our own writing is not something our group was used to; we weren't used to being in the spotlight, especially with our writing. When Kim R presented her piece to us and expressed the need for time to discuss the piece and feelings of confusion, excitement, and curiosity attached to being a writer, she concluded this way:

> Kim R: Sorry, I had to do that.
>
> Rick: Don't be sorry, that's what we're here for, I think.

And then she withdrew her apology, or perhaps offered a bit of a justification for taking the spotlight because of her attachment to and urgency about what was happening in her writing:

> Kim R: I mean, it's very important to me right now, so . . .

And when Kim Z suggests that Kim R work to conclude her writing:

> Kim Z: Now hurry up and get it done so we can see, okay?

Kim R responds in a way that demonstrates that she is finding something within herself that she senses may be slow to develop; it's her writing voice:

> Kim R: It's not going to be a hurry-up thing. (Transcript 16.2 EV 3/8/95)

And it isn't. Kim R, discovering herself, is also teaching the group by demonstrating her own journey into self.

Mona expressed how difficult it is to face one's self as a writer; she spent each Saturday morning writing. Reading helped her writing because it helped her realize that she didn't need to write to prove herself; she could write to show herself in the quote presented earlier:

> Mona: When I first began writing this it . . .was like I was out to prove something to someone. And then I started reading The Art of Teaching Writing [Calkins, 1994]. And I thought why am I writing that way, I don't like to write that way so the second Saturday morning, I got up and I wrote the next thing which is what I'm going to share with you and I don't know what I'm going to do with this part yet. And this part isn't as long as that part so we're all okay. (Laughter) But I think this is going to lead into what I will write at the end. . . (Transcript 16.3 3/28/95)

We listened and listened to each others' writing. Yet, what does it mean to find a voice as a teacher writer? For our group it meant that we believed that we had something that others ought to hear. We wanted the impact of our work with children to extend beyond the classroom walls and discussions in the teachers lounge. We cultivated a sense of worth that extended beyond our original notions of what it means to be a teacher. We let the thoughtful voices within our minds step outside, feel vulnerable, and gather support in order to grow even more.

Themes

The themes that will be discussed in this section emerged from an ongoing ethnographic analysis of the data (Spradley, 1980). It is not possible to discuss the themes without first mentioning the difficulty of teacher, and subsequent or concurrent school, change. That difficulty has been documented in the past (Sarason, 1971)and more recently (Griffin, 1995). Even as individual teachers might want to change, indeed actively pursue change:

> [l]urking in the background are always the many-headed hydras of school culture, the barriers to deep and lasting changes in student-teacher interactions that remain hidden from most participants until their pervasive influence is felt. . . Unfortunately, these conventions are not attended to, often because they simply are not obvious, change efforts founder, and, in the end, teachers are seen once again as foot-dragging impediments to school improvement. (p. 44)

The "regularities" (Sarason, 1971) of the school make change difficult; Sarason (1990) refers to the many facets of school culture that work to keep schools the same as "the intractability to reform". He discusses unlearning, relearning, and the necessity of a commitment of time (p. 146) as elements that are also often overlooked by those involved in change. It seems that the culture of the school protects itself from any change.

Discussions of the work that teachers do must also focus on issues such as putting an end to the objectification of teaching. Our work was not neutral and it was not objective; it could not be because:

> neutrality, objectivity, observable facts, transparent description, clean separation of the interpreter and the interpreted--all these concepts basic to positivist ways of knowing are called into question. Science as codified by conventional methods which marginalize value issues is being reformulated in a way that foregrounds science as value-constituted and constituting enterprise, no more outside the power/knowledge nexus than any other human enterprise. (Lather, 1991, p. 105)

We were working, many times, in the area of "critical thought," which we sought to turn into "emancipatory action" (Lather, p. 109) in our group, in our classrooms, and in the school.

Brady's (1995) call for "the need for all voices to be equally privileged so that educators and students can locate themselves in history in order to function as the subject of history rather than simply the object" (p. 44) and the need to put an end to "teachers . . . deskilling themselves" (p. 67) at the demand of district (and, therefore, corporate) directives is a call for liberatory staff development (Yonemura, 1982). It is a call for the work that needs to be done to let teachers be the substantive thinkers that Shannon (1989) knows they can be. Although he is discussing the teaching of reading, his views on teacher liberation apply to teacher thinking in all areas of teacher growth:

> Helping both teachers and students to develop their abilities to read their own histories and culture, to see their connections with the large social structure, and to act according to this new knowledge against external control will not only arrest the spread of rationalization of reading programs on a local level but can also lead to its defeat across the United States. (p. 147)

Our conversations were vehicles for expressing hope. Van Manen (1990) expresses the relationship between a theme, like hope, and teaching and learning.

> Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations, and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life. (p. 37) . . .
> *In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects of qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is.* (p. 107) . . .
> We might now turn to the phenomenon of teaching and ask if "having hope for children" is an essential theme of the experience of teaching. Can one imagine being a teacher without having hope for children? Is such a person still a teacher or would the meaning of

> teaching lose its fundamental meaning if it were not sustained by hope? (p. 109)

Our inquiry group was saturated with hope. And that hope rests very much on democracy. Lester & Onore's (1990) discussion of the beliefs underlying a democratic classroom dovetails well with life in our group, where teachers who express "intention, commitment, and ownership" of their learning and "experiences, feelings, beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions" (Lester & Onore, p. 23) are respected. It is within the spirit of hope, democracy, and change that the following themes emerged.

Identification

Identification emerged as a theme of the change process. There are many facets to identification, each is discussed in this section.

Identification of self. The teachers in our group found themselves in a variety of roles; the roles emerged as the year progressed. They found themselves as researchers early in the year. They had identified problems, areas of concern, or curiosities that they wanted to pursue by engaging in practical inquiry (Richardson, 1994). The teachers' research led to written language activity, thus they identified themselves as writers, too. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) suggest that "current research on teaching. . .constrains, and at times even makes invisible, teachers' roles in the generation of knowledge about teaching and learning in classrooms" (p. 3). Individuals within our group became consumers and creators of knowledge about teaching and learning, similar to some of the (rare) groups that Cochran-Smith and Lytle (p. 4) cite.

Our writing and thinking developed over the course of our time together and this led to a sense of voice. Teachers found their voices, expressed them, developed them over time, and risked speaking out about their own

practice, practices within the school, and district policies. Each teacher found her self in these ways (as a researcher, a writer, a thinker, an orator, and, for some, an advocate); each grew because of what she found.

Identification of Colleagues. The members of our group had not spoken significantly across grade levels. By being part of our group, they began affiliations with other grade levels and gained insights into the thinking of teachers at other grade levels as well as understanding of the nature of the activities undertaken in those classrooms. These were new affiliations and tended to be threatening to non-group members. There was, then, an identification of colleagues, individuals who were not previously regarded as those with whom one might associate professionally.

Identification of curriculum. Identification of curriculum means that members of our group were actively involved in creating curriculum (Short & Burke, 1991) as they identified needs and interests of children. Inquiry (Short & Harste, with Burke, 1996) was the main vehicle for the identification of curriculum and the identification process was multi-layered. The students were studying specific areas; the teachers were studying the students; the teachers were studying themselves as members of our group; and the group was studying itself through my research agenda of studying the group. This was curriculum for all learners.

There was considerable anxiety associated with the process of creating curriculum as teachers wanted the children to meet with success, feared that the principal might disapprove, and were anxious about test results as the end of the year approached. Identification of curriculum also means implementation as the teachers supported their students in assuming the initiative necessary to pursue areas of interest. On one layer, the

students were pursuing that interest; on another layer, the teachers were pursuing their interest in the students' pursuing areas of interest to the students.

Identification of teacher needs. Over the course of the year, our meetings became a forum in which teachers could express their needs. At times, they wanted to explore and make sense of what was happening in their classrooms; other times the need to deal with school-wide issues took precedence. And there were sessions devoted to personal lives as those lives overflowed into school. The public (i.e., within our group) expression of needs is not common to schools because the ethos of most schools (Lortie, 1975) forbids such activity. But our group was what Vivian Paley (1995) calls a "safe harbor" for our feelings and thoughts.

Identification of student needs. The members of our group developed their kidwatching (Goodman, 1985) skills because of their interactions with each other. The sharing of ideas led to curiosities about the possiblities of what children might be able to do in classrooms. Such curiosity led to carefully listening to the expressed and implicit needs and interests of children, and the development of a curriculum that responded to those needs and interests. Kim R and Kim L walked around their rooms with notebooks, capturing bits of conversations verbatim. They brought these language snippets with them to our meetings and would describe the contexts from which they were taken; then they demonstrated how to use the students' voices to create inquiry groups.

Increasingly, our group became intrigued with inquiry. Members wanted to know how to help children identify a question or an interest. They wanted to understand the cognitive and social conditions that support children's engagement in inquiry. Inquiry assumed the status of a *student*

need because Kim R and Kim L demonstrated all that could be learned through this process. Identification was not a smooth and easy process; it sent ripples through the school culture as relationships, curriculum, and institutional regularities (Sarason, 1971) were threatened.

Identification as subjectification. Identification, as a theme, is supported by the co-emergence of subjectification of teachers' lived experiences with their identification of self, voice, colleagues, relationships, and curriculum. Subjectification and identification are processes of taking ownership of self, voice, curriculum, questions, and needs. It is an active process of "teaching against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991), of invention of self (or re-invention, in the case of Liz and Linda who felt they had learned much in the past, abandoned it, and were rediscovering their roots and beliefs).

Disruption

The theme of disruption is intriguing because it arose in the context of a hopeful and democratic setting, our group. I do not intend to paint a rosy picture of a school in which everyone gets along (they don't), all kids are well behaved (they're not), and the teachers boast of high test scores. It's not this way. Indeed, one day Mr. Z was upset because one of the first graders whom he had left alone in the principal's office had urinated on the rug, on purpose, dropping his pants and urinating as the school counselor was approaching to talk to the child about the importance of not hitting his teacher. There are many disagreements, voiced publicly at faculty meetings and privately in smaller groups. But the ethos (Lortie, 1975) of the school is one of hope; one of a spirit of democracy. This is largely the doing of Mr. Z, the principal, because he is very respectful of most teachers' stances and he usually hires smart dedicated teachers. He

is honest and open about his concerns and directly confronts teachers who are not focused on helping children learn. In spite of that, or because of it, or along with it, the presence and activity of our group caused disruption.

Disruption is unsettling, in the least. The usual context of the situation (Geertz, 1973) is made visible and, therefore, begins to seem unusual; the regularities are upset or, in the least, upsetting as they are brought into focus by group members. As with the theme of identification, disruption is a theme that has many layers. Each layer becomes increasingly visible when the theme is used as a lens to understand it. And, teachers in our group became visible because they were doing the work that contributed to the sense of disruption.

Disruption of self. The teachers in our group became unsettled within themselves. Originally, this seemed to reflect the initiation of conversations which, although not intended to cultivate competition, made individuals feel that others were meeting the needs of students with greater efficacy than self. The image of self as a teacher, doing her best, supporting her students' learning, was shaken a bit. Teachers voiced this sense of uncertainty as the safety and willingness to take a risk within our group intensified. Often, disruption of self as an efficacious teacher was expressed by a call to understand what another teacher was doing. Group members wanted to know how the students did something, what the teacher's role was, how the teacher kept track, and how decisions were made in the classroom.

The desire to examine practice, to write, to express self, to find voice, to create curriculum, and to support inquiry within self and the classroom should, perhaps, seem more rooted in affirmation of self than in uprooting

(disruption) of self. But teachers who are learners experience the tension within the zone of their learning; they feel dissonance expressed as discomfort as they create or extend their learning.

Our study group was a place in which the teachers could cultivate and express their passion about teaching and learning; indeed, as Perrone (1991) points out, teachers who are passionate about learning want to study their practices, the curriculum, the learning environment, and themselves.

> Schools need to promote and support passion of this kind. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their learning, on how they first came to the interests they posses and how to revitalize those interests. This suggests once more the need for schools to be settings where teachers share their learning with each other, read together, and have opportunities for writing and further study. The school needs to be a center of inquiry, an intellectually oriented place. (p. 117)

Perrone does not discuss the feelings of disruption that accompany such passion. Our group found that passion coincided with feelings of loss within self, much as Deal (1990) discusses certain facets of staff development that lead to teachers experiencing grief as they let go of old practices. We were letting go of old practices, exploring new ideas, and exploring self as teacher, learner, thinker, reader, writer, and more. The feelings of disruption were not limited to self.

Disruption of relationships. After working together in the same school for a few years, it certainly seems natural that teachers would expect each other to "be" together in predictable ways, based on relationships that have emerged over the course of those years. A change in a single individual or in a group of individuals, such as some of the changes our group experienced and precipitated, disrupted existing relationships. The discomfort may be a manifestation of a ripple-effect

of one person's learning as she challenges team members, and other staff about extant beliefs or practices within the school. A new role for self involves increased reflection; time for that reflection is not a part of living in school. Thus, there is pressure as relationships within the self change, relationships with others change, and the teacher's view of life in school and the classroom changes.

Our group was a threat to relationships that were tentative as well as those that were firm. Kim Z was quite friendly with her team in a friendship that extended beyond cordial collegiality. She and the three other members of the second grade team often met on weekends, Fridays after a week of school, and during school vacations. Their families were friendly as spouses got along well. One of Kim's second grade colleagues began to change in her relationship to Kim, becoming pert, almost flippant, with her. She was upset because Kim decided to allow her class to pursue a unit of study different from the other three second grade classrooms. Typically, the team did everything quite similarly, including themed unit studies. Kim's decision to allow her class to engage in inquiry caused stress on her relationship with her colleague and friend.

Kim was quite open to sharing her ideas, discussing what we did in our study group, and working to include the other team members in her thinking, but she could not guarantee that all the team members' classrooms would eventually study the same things. By the end of March, Kim was sufficiently upset that she requested Mr. Z to move her to another grade level, preferably first grade where the other Kims taught. This worked out because of disruption on the first grade team.

One of the first grade teachers, Jackie (pseudonym), who was not in our study group, grew increasingly resentful as she felt criticized by Kim L

and Kim R. Kim R suggested that Jackie was not interested in investing the time and energy that inquiry demanded--and that was okay with Kim R, but Jackie remained intimidated and, eventually, angry and resentful at the attention given to the inquiry-based classrooms by me, Jane (the district early childhood consultant), and other teachers in the district who visited the first grade at Elmwood. Jackie was committed to teaching from the basal and maintaining a lot of control over the children. Kim R and Kim L were developing inquiry based democratic classrooms. The issue was not whether the children in the different first grade classrooms were learning; the issue was that a team that formerly planned many activities together was disrupted by a split in the nature of classroom activity.

Disruption of curriculum. Curriculum as experience has been described at length elsewhere (Dewey, 1938) and will not be reiterated here. The disruption of self and relationships was inextricably tied to the nature of classroom activity, i.e.: the curriculum. The self, relationships, and curriculum overflow into one another. Indeed, they are not layers, as suggested earlier, that are separate, to be peeled back and understood as separate pieces or facets of teacher growth; they are, instead, phenomenological life processes, Van Manen's (1990) "essentials", that a teacher cultivates with each affecting the other in subtle and disruptive ways.

Cohen (1995) suggests that the intersection of self, others, and curriculum (district policy) is indeed the point from which systemic change can be initiated. The teacher, as the individual responsible for the nature of the daily enactment of curriculum, is the key player in change. Cohen submits that the move away from teaching as a technical career,

focused on students' performance on standardized tests, is a move towards greater professionalism involving teachers as creators of curriculum, indeed, as co-creators of curriculum with their students. What this means for schools is a change in the nature of curriculum; it is a move towards a renewed understanding of what it means to be a professional teacher. It means a disruption of self, relationships, and the curriculum:

> [S]ystemic reform envisions profound changes in teachers' professionalism, including steep elevation of professional knowledge and skill, extraordinary complication in teachers' roles, and radically new and demanding conceptions of professional conduct. (Cohen, 1995, p. 16).

Changes in self, curriculum, and relationships have an impact on the entire school. Teachers need a more accessible school media center, so they approach the principal for an "open" media center that children can access any time of day. They ask for input into their schedules so that they can create larger blocks of time during the school day when their students are not interrupted and other blocks for teachers to work together (e.g.: by having their special classes, such as physical education, immediately before or after lunch). The physical space of the building is affected when teachers allow students into the teachers lounge, hallway, or teacher prep center (a small room provided for teachers' desks), areas previously not available for student use. And these changes caused tension because they disrupted the institutional regularities (Sarason, 1971) that have long been in place.

Almost twenty five years ago, Ginott (1972) suggested the difficulty of change when he offered advice to teachers for dealing with each other and with children.

> Improvement seldom occurs spontaneously. More often it is attained by deliberate effort. Every teacher can become aware of attitudes

> that alienate, words that insult, and acts that hurt. He [or she] can acquire competence and caution in communication, and become less abrasive and less provocative. (p. 63)

But Ginott did not deal with the institutional issues in which communication must occur. Our group found the connectedness between self, others, institution, and curriculum. We felt the pain and the joy of growth as that growth moved us away from some beliefs, practices, and colleagues and moved us toward others. We cultivated disruption and we experienced disruption as we identified our selves and the growth within our group.

Disruption, then, is not only a sign of growth, it is foundational to growth. We looked at, worked at understanding, and began to deal with the intensity of emotions that come with change, growth, risk-taking, and disruption. Sarason (1990) suggests that, "[w]e have relatively few studies on what teaching in our schools does to teachers and other personnel" (p. 143). I would suggest that we have even fewer studies that help us understand what inquiring teachers in our schools do to teachers and other personnel. Our work certainly suggests that they disrupt many facets of schools.

Implications

The work that our group undertook has implications for understanding and refining the process of servicing-in, particularly in light of what occurs as servicing-in is enacted as inquiry. Richardson (1994) has suggested that "[w]e know little about how to work with teachers in helping them improve their practical inquiry" (p. 9). Perhaps the complexity, intensity, and the nature of the commitment of teacher inquiry contribute to our lack of knowledge about how to improve inquiry. In this section, I will present some implications of our work.

Understanding Servicing-In

Servicing-in is inquiry. It is teachers studying themselves with an outsider who is also studying with them. When teachers are supported emotionally, cognitively, and in other ways by an outsider (me, in the present study) and by each other, an atmosphere of caring (Noddings, 1984) may be created. Caring, as moral and ethical activity, is foundational to the inquiry activity that emerges when teachers mutually construct an agenda for study of self, others, curriculum, learning, and lived experiences in school. All participants benefit from the relationship. The relational nature of caring supports the dissolution of the objectification of teachers as they find voice, energy, and direction within self and across self in a thought collective. Our study group was a thought collective in which ideas were safely presented, gently received, and passionately discussed. The assumption of ownership by group members mirrored what we know children require in classroom endeavors (Atwell, 1987). Group as members assumed ownership of self, relationship, and curriculum.

Sustaining the Commitment

Servicing-in also requires commitment. Commitment is one facet of ownership and expresses to the members of the group that there is a willingness to sustain the group over time. Our group, in its second year together at the time of this writing, continues to teach me about commitment. As an outsider, I assumed teachers would be committed to a single project over time. That is not the case. As the school year drew to a close, folks were willing to engage in some writing over the summer, but most wanted to use the summer to plan for the coming year. There is a commitment to meet and to continue some writing about the past, but

the focus of energy is clearly on the school year that is being or about to be lived. The significance of this learning is that teacher inquiry that spans more than one school year may require a theme that is applicable across school years.

Perhaps, our theme is inquiry. The members of our group are curious about how kids are curious (and I am curious about how teachers are curious). The layers of inquiry are still there; the complications emerge because children in the new class have different personalities, needs, and interests. The teachers want to address the present group. Kim R said, "I'm done with that piece. I am. I'm not writing any more on it. I've got new kids and want to focus on them." I convinced her that her piece on the rat group's inquiry was so close to being finished and that other teachers would learn so much from reading it that she really ought to complete it. Kim felt a responsibility to other teachers and decided to finish the photo essay. Her energy, though, is clearly on the class that she has at the present. Other group members confirmed this feeling of dedication to the present group of children that a teacher is teaching.

It is, then, our curiosity that helps sustain us as a group. And it is the relationships we have built, the curricular issues we have struggled with, the expressions of our 'selfs', and the time to just breathe together. The commitment of time and energy to our group remains because our group is a safe place to think aloud. Such thinking is essential if we are to face the complex nature of inquiry.

Politics and Inquiry

Disrupting the regularity of school life is political work. Servicing-in, as a vehicle for inquiry, supports disruption and is, therefore, political work. Teachers gathering, across grade levels and on a regular (and

optional) basis are a threat to the school. They take the risks necessary in that they express what is occurring in their classrooms and their understanding of the impact of the school context (and the various relationships there) upon their classrooms. They name things. Bringing issues to the floor, bringing them to consciousness and expressing them, is viewed as a threat by those within as well as outside of the group.

Identification leads to disruption.

Disruption leads to identification.

Inquiry that results in teachers writing is a political act. Teachers do not typically write. Indeed, the expectation is that teachers will be voiceless technicians responsible for delivering preplanned curriculum. The cultivation and expression of voice is a threat to the individual, the team, the rest of the teachers in the school, the principal, and the district. Although it may be expected that teachers unions negotiate for salary, there is rarely an expectation that teachers negotiate for the right to create curriculum; indeed, districts and corporations rely upon teachers not engaging in such work. And, as in the case of our group, it is not expected that teachers will facilitate children in the creation of curriculum via the children's questions. Layers of inquiry are political signposts that threaten regularities. This type of disruption is a political act. It sends messages that terrify corporations responsible for the manufacture and sale of curricular materials because it implies that negations with an entire system might disintegrate into having to face individual teachers and respond to their (and their students') demands for materials, texts, and other curricular support.

Teachers writing is teachers growing. It is reflection in action, reflection on action, reflection after action, and reflection for subsequent

action. It suggests group generated (within the thought collective) awareness, understandings, and plans for action. This intimidates non-writers because their job definitions appear threatened. Graves (1983; 1986) suggested that teachers write what they know. When teachers write as they are coming to know, they not only find voice in their understanding, they anticipate action plans based on that understanding and that leads to subsequent writing, thinking, and action. The hegemony of schools works hard to undermine such work.

Maxine Greene (1995) proposes that the purpose of education is to make sense of our lives. But what happens when making sense of your life means that you identify oppression and the oppressor wants to perpetuate the illusion that you are not oppressed?

Disruption happens.

Recall that the district office supported the teachers at Elmwood in their R & D year by paying for substitute teachers so that the teachers had time for planning and thinking. Our group grew out of those planning days. The district office does, however, perpetuate the technical nature of school by withdrawing support after one year resulting in the teachers at Elmwood feeling abandoned. The second year that our group met (1995-1996), we found it more difficult to find common times to meet. The spotlight was off of Elmwood and on other schools where the R & D process was to be instituted. But change takes more than one year (Fullan, 1991). Teacher inquiry does not remain the district office focus because the interest moves to various reading programs, math curriculum, classroom management programs, or other curricular innovations that the district wants to implement based on the district being sold certain items. Successive implementations, typically of ideologically conflicting

programs, leaves teachers confused and at the mercy of the district office. Support for genuine inquiry assumes low status because of fear of test scores and the pressure from various interest groups (corporations) in selling to the district.

Teachers who are committed to thinking and writing tend to slow things down. They want to cultivate and understand a philosophical base (as Linda and Liz have written of their philosophical journey) and work to enact that philosophy into curriculum. Although they tend to focus on the immediacy of one year, teacher inquirers also draw upon the leanings from previous years to make sense of the year they are living. They do this by re-viewing writing from years' past, by bringing their thinking to a group of caring individuals, and by writing in the present year, too.

Such activity is political because it demands time and teachers are not given time to do this serious reflective activity. The political and social and economic contexts of school work to perpetuate and reproduce the existing school and this puts tension on individuals who want to move in new directions. The nature of school perpetuates the cellular (Lortie, 1975) nature of teaching but we stepped out of separate cells and into a common forum which served to disrupt the context.

> But throughout the long, formative decades of the modern school system, schools were organized around teacher separation rather than teacher interdependence. Curricula assumed such mutual separation and served coordinating functions by aligning the contributions of teachers in different grades and subjects to student development. Elementary education came to be seen as a matter of accretion--of serial learning in particular subjects. (Lortie, 1975, p. 14-15)
>
> Teacher *interdependence* would have required that each teacher find and accept a particular role within the matrix of interpersonal relationships in the school. (Emphasis added) (p. 16)

Interdependence creates tension because "[a] change in the individual influences social dimensions, which in turn influence the individual" (LeFevre, 1987, p. 37). This tension demands that teachers know what they are doing even as they are creating that knowing because they feel challenged or threatened by angry colleagues who are not interested in teaching based in inquiry. Yet schools can change, as Lester and Onore (1990) have shown. A critical mass of teachers can send ripples through the school that change the ethos of the institution.

Tragedy or Romance?

Coming to the end of writing about our year of intense work, I find myself wondering if this 'ends' as a tragedy or a romance. Do the teacher researchers, immersed in the processes of creating knowledge, self, and curriculum, walk off into the teaching sunset arm in arm with newly found power and success? Clark (1990) writes that

> [T]he term conversation suggests . . . that any text must function within the larger context of a succession of texts that respond to each other in the process of defining knowledge that the community of people who read and write them can share. (p. 36)

The successive views of texts is reminiscent of Halliday and Hasan's (1985) con-texts. The lived experiences of the teachers within the school consists of multiple texts, layers of texts, which can be referred to as con-texts of self, others, and curriculum. And the work is both exhilarating and draining.

Hard Work--Exhilarating

The bulk of this paper is about the joys of our group. Through our interactions, we made sense of the texts and con-texts in which we lived our teaching and researching lives. There were changes in curriculum, relationships, and self that sent ripples through each of these and,

additionally, through the school and district. We found or re-found our voices and felt those voices echo in growth and change. I will not reiterate those joys here because they are the very substance of this paper. The finding or refinding of self, the celebrations of personal growth, the finding of each other and the celebrations of new relationships, the finding of children and teachers as active creators of curriculum, and the effect of those celebrations on the school and district are exhilarating.

The hard work that was draining is intriguing because not only does it have implications for the future of teacher research, it is, indeed, the very same work that was exhilarating.

Hard Work--Draining

Teacher inquiry is hard work. Being continually "on," living against the grain, is draining because of the energy expended in taking ownership of self, curriculum, and relationships. It means teachers take on a second job, one that I've come to call metateaching or metapedagogy. They teach ***and*** they study their teaching as it relates to self, relationships, curriculum, and more.

Inquiry is passion and it is pain.

One Wednesday afternoon, as we met in Kim R's and Kim L's commons space between their two classrooms, I looked around the room and I saw some very tired folks. "This is such hard work," I said. "I feel like we need a rest." Some heads nodded in affirmation.

"Not me," said Liz. "I feel energized by all this. I'm ready to go go go."

I looked at her in amazement. She's the mother of children who participate in school activities, she supported Linda when Linda's husband was dying and after he died, and she taught a diverse and challenging

class. Inquiry is passion and inquiry is pain. As a professor, I can focus on research because it is part of my job description; for the members of our group it was a reflection of their dedication, thirst for knowledge, and commitment to self, each other, and children. The invention of self as an inquirer is not easy. It demands the confrontation of all of the issues outlined above and living with the tension between and within identification and disruption. It is a process of building, confirming, and affirming that is saturated with the tension that one feels when growing and changing and the added stress when such work is done in an environment that works to perpetuate itself (knowingly or unknowingly).

Our conversations supported our growth and, simultaneously, were intensely invigorating and draining. Gibboney (1994) has little hope for schools that don't engage in conversations but suggests that those who engage will pay a price:

> Conversation uses language to foster thinking to make schools more stimulating places in which to learn and to teach; and conversation may be a practical way to renew schools in educationally fundamental ways. . .
>
> School reform efforts that rely on the play of powerful social dynamics [conversation] exact a cost. This cost is paid for in hard physical, emotional and intellectual dollars. The value of these dollars is created by the participants' willingness to deal with uncertainty within a dialogue process that demands both thought and practical action. These are tough demands, but any serious reform, whatever its mode of intervention, will require that this payment be made. Our seriousness about reform and our maturity as a profession will be determined by our willingness to undertake this work and make the payment. (p. 214)

This work is hard work, and it is political.

Our conversations developed into teacher research that is political and social because it occurred in a context that demanded sameness and continuity. Inquiry into self, classroom, relationships, and curriculum is a

process of invention that occurs under adversity and, often, self-doubt and oppression. It is time to acknowledge this intensity and to name it and to assume responsibility for it. Perhaps the social context, the very nature of school, makes teacher inquiry too draining for already overworked individuals.

The energy that is needed to grow under these conditions is often overlooked in the literature on teacher research. But it does appear in other places. Lareau (1989) talks about "the dark side of parent involvement" (p. 148), suggesting that parent involvement increased stress, made parents feel that their children were increasingly vulnerable as those parents expressed themselves on behalf of their children, and could have negative effects on home life. The teachers in our group were increasing their *teacher* involvement. As such, they felt many of the same feelings of the parents in Lareau's study.

Leiberman (1995) found that the "ways teachers learn may be more like the ways students learn" (p. 592) because both groups learn in an active, thoughtful way that involves articulation of learning. In light of the notion of the similarities between teacher and student learning, the findings of Moll and Diaz (1987) seem appropriate for the teachers in our study group:

> The key to understanding. . . is in understanding the dynamics of material, local settings. To succeed in school one does not need a special culture . . .success and failure is in the social organization of schooling, in the organization of the experience itself. (p. 311)

Moll and Diaz point to the structures of participation (Philips, 1971) of a particular school setting. The complexities of those structures affect the construction of self, as evidenced by the ways in which identification and disruption emerged as themes. Our work required enormous amounts of

energy, intense honesty, and the willingness to assume ownership, all of which made us strong and made us tired.

There are, then, further implications or possiblities for our work. First, there is the idea of advocacy. Second, I consider the ways in which schools might change to support this work institutionally.

Advocacy and Teacher Study Groups

The teachers in our group have initiated the "upgrading of the prestige of the teaching profession" that Bruner (1963) called for over thirty years ago. This may be tiring work, but there is no stopping it now. Some of us might not write, but all of us will continue to make sense of things in our contexts and, in light of that sense-making, will respond to the call for action.

Principals and other district and school administrators may expect that teachers will want input into many facets of living in schools. Teachers will want time to think, to form thought collectives that have different arrangements than are traditional (not restricted to grade level), and to have time to read and react with their collectives.

The work in collectives of thought will result in action for kids and for curriculum. The desire to control the "local settings" (Moll & Diaz, 1987) will be increasingly expressed as teachers create curriculum with children, indeed become coresearchers with the children in their classrooms as they work to uncover the curricular and learning possiblities within the classroom.

Teachers who invest in inquiry may develop new and renewed relationships with colleagues and those relationships may manifest themselves in political and economic arenas within the district. But, it is not realistic for district administrators to expect all teachers to become

inquirers (indeed, some administrators and teachers might dread this). It is realistic to expect groups to form which will disrupt the existing contexts of the schools. We can expect discomfort as teachers will become divided along a spectrum of possibilities, some teachers wanting to create curriculum with children, others not, others inventing things we haven't thought of yet because we can expect the unexpected when teachers are encouraged to think and express themselves.

There will be, then, advocacy for self, relationships, curriculum, children, and, eventually, the very ethos of the school and the profession. By ethos, I refer to Lortie's (1975) definition of ethos as "the pattern of orientations and sentiments which is peculiar to teachers and which distinguishes them from members of other occupations" (p. viii). If we are to honor this growth, we need to think of ways in which schools may be places for teachers to *safely* engage actively in systematic inquiry. For schools to be "safe harbors", they must be "a place where you are able to tell the truth about yourself and not feel ashamed" (Paley, 1995, p. 130). We might expect tension in schools: tension because teacher inquiry is political; tension because some are not interested and the school becomes divided; tension because teachers want more time to engage in inquiry with others; tension because of the disruption of the way things are; tension as support personnel, principals, and other staff begin the same process, reexamine their roles, and try to make sense of the changing schools; and tension because sustaining the intensity that accompanies inquiry can be so draining and so exhilarating.

How can we perpetuate the joy of learning that the group at Elmwood cultivated within itself? Perhaps, by paying attention to the wavy nature

of such work. Interests waxed and waned continually and at different times for different folks for different reasons as the year progressed. We need to honor the teacher-inquirer as cycling in and out of systematic inquiry, as they are constantly, perhaps less formally at times, inquiring. Inquiry is thinking, questioning, working, wondering, writing, sharing, meditating, and planning. It has, at times, no discernible and predictable order, and we delight in that as much as we are confused by it. It is the creation of self, the uncovering of self, and the intersection of self with children, language, learning, the school, the community, and more. To perpetuate this process demands the individual expression of each self within a school, the search for self wildly and passionately within imagination. It requires that we enter the "great conversations", indeed, disrupt the conversations, that Maxine Greene describes:

> Allowing myself to be carried along by the great conversation initiated by others (and, indeed, maintained by others), I would not have to disrupt. I would not have to begin anything; I would need only be swept along by what the great ones have said and remain partially submerged in them.
> But then I think of how much beginnings have to do with freedom, how much disruption has to do with consciousness and the awareness of possibility that has so much to do with teaching other human beings. And I think that if I and other teachers truly want to provoke our students to break though the limits of the conventional and the taken for granted, we ourselves have to experience breaks with what has been established in our lives; we have to keep arousing ourselves to begin again. (Greene, 1995, p. 109)

Teacher groups, such as ours, are about discovering the possiblities for ourselves, within and among and between ourselves, and with the children with whom we live our lives in schools. The groups are a forum, a thought collective, a safe harbor, and they support teachers as we create schools as places for thinking, growing, inquiry, and learning.

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